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MIRRIKH

OR

A WOMAN FROM MARS

A TALE OF OCCULT ADVENTURE

BY

FRANCIS WORCESTER DOUGHTY

ILLUSTRATED

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MIRRIKH.

BOOK I.

LEVITATION.

CHAPTER I.

PANOMPIN.

In 1870 I was at Panompin.

But for this—and it was only by accident that I chanced to be there—my part in the singular adventures which I am about to narrate would never have been played.

Not that there existed any reason why I should not be at Panompin in the year mentioned; still it seemed strange to be wandering alone about the streets of the Cambodian capital free from all responsibility, when only two short months before I had been loaded down with a burden of care which promised to be never-ending, and I would just as soon have thought then of going to the moon.

Permit me before proceeding any further to introduce myself.

I am George Wylde, ex-American Consul at Swatow. The addition of the prefix to my official title was purely of my own seeking. I felt that I had seen enough of Swatow, and of China too, for that matter. I resigned simply because I wanted to get away.

My reasons—well, I suppose they must be stated, and I may as well undertake the disagreeable task first as last. I had trouble with my wife, serious trouble which had been constantly increasing during the five years of our married life. This trouble had culminated in a way that would

have wrecked the lives of most men. My wife appropriated as much of my personal property as she could readily lay her hands upon, and in company with an English adventurer left Swatow for parts unknown.

Thank God there were no motherless children left behind her, our only offspring had been taken from us before we left New York.

How she wept on that cold October afternoon when we laid the little fellow in Greenwood ! How she clung to me, how—but there, I have no more to say about it. When she went I swore that I would tear her image alike from my heart and memory—that I would never raise my finger to find her. I simply let her go.

It was getting dark when I returned from my spin on the Mesap that evening, and in Cambodia the twilight does not last long. I remember I had considerable difficulty in making my way among the mass of native boats which lined the shore, and was not a little preplexed to find the particular float from which I had started, for the low, bamboo huts, with their sloping roofs of thatch all looked alike to my unaccustomed eyes, and it was difficult to tell one from the other. At last, however, I found it, and making fast, leaped ashore.

Lighting a cheroot I drew on my coat and soon found myself strolling leisurely along the principal street of Panompin, elbowed by Chinamen, Klings, Siamese, all easily distinguishable from the native Cambodians by their peculiar costumes and facial distinctions. I was intent upon my thoughts, which concerned chiefly the contents of the windows of the bamboo shops beside me, for just then I was contemplating a descriptive work upon the manners and customs of Farther India ; and I had long since accustomed myself to habits of observation ; for a traveller with a retentive memory even the most casual stroll is never taken in vain.

The main thoroughfare of the city runs north and south along the river, and I had proceeded for a considerable distance—was almost in sight of King Norodom's palace, in fact, when a person brushed past me who certainly was neither Chinese, Kling nor Cambodian, and at the same time was as different from a European as an Englishman from a citizen of Timbuctoo.

A man dressed after the fashion of the wealthy native

gentleman of Calcutta, half European, half Oriental. But for the somewhat exaggerated white turban which covered his head, there was nothing about his apparel which need have attracted attention in the streets of Panompin or any other city in the East, save in one particular—the whole lower portion of his face, from the nose down, was concealed behind a black silk covering that extended high up on the cheeks, being secured by cords passing around the ears. The cloth did not cover the ears, but fitted close beneath them; it also passed completely around the neck, concealing it from view, which left only the upper part of the face visible. This was yellowish—not yellow as a Chinaman's face is yellow, but more like a Cuban's, or Spanish American's. The eyes were small, black and piercing, yet mild and full of intelligence. Certainly there was nothing disagreeable about the face—what was to be seen of it, at least—rather the reverse.

I was puzzled. Women with partially veiled features are no novelty to an old traveller like myself; but a man—well, here was something I had never seen before.

But my interest in this mysterious individual was not long enduring. In a moment or two I had dismissed him from my thoughts with the conclusion that he probably had excellent reasons for covering the lower part of his face. "Some dreadful disfigurement," I reflected, for such things are common enough in the East; and I sauntered on.

My mind was in that peculiar frame which often seizes us after some great calamity. We know that the worst has happened; we comprehend that the long anticipated has at length been realized; that we are upon the other side of the mountain of awful possibilities conjured up during weeks, months, years, perhaps, of anxious expectation, and we say to ourselves that it is all over, it cannot be changed; if there is no hope at least no cause for further anxiety exists. There are states when the over-taxed brain demands rest and will have it. I was in such a state just then.

Positively I could not think connectedly for five minutes upon any subject without that sensation of tightness above the eyes which tired brain-workers know so well. Even to speculate upon the mystery of that covered face made my head ache, and I therefore dismissed the subject abruptly and turned my attention to the shop windows again, wandering on through the crowd until I found myself at last in the

neighborhood of the pagoda, a ruinous old affair, that I had already visited, surrounded by image houses, in one of which is an immense gilded Buddha with mother of pearl finger nails and eyes.

Both the mound upon which it stands and the pagoda itself are built of curious little bricks, and from the summit of the former a splendid view of the city, and even as far as the great Makong river, can be had. Any one is at liberty to visit the pagoda; the prejudices of religion sit very lightly upon these Cambodians. I was just debating whether it would not be a good idea to climb the steps and look down upon Panompin by moonlight, when a sudden shouting behind aroused me from my reverie and set me on the alert at once.

There was some excitement further down the street; I could see an angry crowd surging, and almost in the same instant I caught sight of a tall figure running toward me. It was the man with the concealed face.

Off the main street lights were not plentiful. Looking back I now perceived that the mob was coming in my direction; but I had scarcely time to reflect upon this when the man was at my side and I saw that his face was no longer hidden.

As any attempt to describe my amazement when I looked upon that face would fail to do it justice, I will simply state that the object of the singular mask was now apparent. The lower part of the face was beardless and black.

"Friend, you are an Englishman—for God's sake help me!" he exclaimed, pausing for an instant. "I met with an accident back there—they are chasing me—they may kill me unless I can manage to get out of their sight."

What had happened to the man? His turban was gone as well as his mask, his clothing was torn and covered with dust. As he stood beside me I noticed that he carried a small hand bag—the kind that we Americans call a "grip sack"—on one side of which was a splash of blood.

Now, I thought I knew something about a Cambodian mob, for only the week before I had seen an unfortunate Chinaman chased through the streets of Panompin and almost torn limb from limb, though for what offense I did not learn, and I saw at a glance that unless something was done, and that pretty quickly, the man who had appealed to me would be beyond need of help.

As it happened, the residence of the American Consul was

not far distant, and by good fortune the consul was my most valued friend. If I could contrive to get this man to the consulate he was safe for the time being at least.

"This way," said I, without an instant's hesitation, pointing toward a street leading off on our right. The next moment we were running side by side with the shouts of the mob ringing in our ears.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded in excellent English.

"To the American consulate. It is but a few steps."

"Good! I shall be safe there. It was only an accident, and I am sure no one can regret it more than I do."

"What happened?" I asked, eyeing him curiously.

For a moment he made no answer but turned a pair of deep set, black eyes upon me with a persistence of gaze positively painful. In vain I tried to withdraw my own eyes from his, but it was quite impossible. I had heard of men who could fascinate by a look. Was I face to face with such a person now? Be that true or false, the face before me was certainly a puzzle—a wonder if it was natural, which I could scarcely credit then.

The line of demarcation was wavy, running just below the ears, half way toward the nose, and then striking obliquely downward to the corner of the mouth, being the same on both sides. Above the line the skin was yellowish white, lighter about the forehead than lower down; below the line the darkness suddenly became an intense black; this included the lower lip and chin, part of each cheek and the throat. I wondered if it extended to the body, but the fact that the hands were of the same shade of color as the forehead seemed to indicate that such could not be the case. Altogether the face was an enigma; yet there was nothing repulsive about it. Nothing could make that face repulsive, for the features were singularly perfect and beneath the heavy eyebrows beamed the intelligence of those peculiar eyes. Have I mentioned that the hair was long, straight and intensely black?"

A moment passed and he removed his gaze, to my great relief.

"I have a defect of sight," he said calmly. "In crossing the street back there I accidentally stumbled over a little girl whom I did not see. I fancy she was not much hurt, but as I stooped down to help her up two fellows set upon me

and before I knew it I was down myself—the only wonder is they did not kill me. I thought they would. You can see with what effect I was forced to use my only weapon, this bag."

"But surely the police—" I began, when he immediately interrupted me.

"The police? They would give me no help. You are an intelligent man. I need not call your attention to the fact that my face is peculiar. I usually hide it, but they tore off its covering, and nothing else was needed to set them upon me like a pack of wolves. Are we almost there?"

"We ought to be within a stone's throw of it now," I replied, when it suddenly dawned upon me that I had made a mistake. Instead of taking the street on which the consulate was situated, I had unwittingly turned down the next one, and now it seemed almost too late to repair my blunder, for the mob had turned the corner, and, catching sight of us, were rushing on like so many mad dogs, shouting as they came in a fashion that was anything but reassuring.

"This is a bad business. We are going wrong!" I burst out.

I could feel his hand tremble as he clutched my arm.

"Don't tell me that," he panted. "You don't know what it is to be differently made from other men. My friend, I have been through this sort of thing before—one cannot always hope to escape."

"Before matters come to a crisis they shall have the opportunity of looking down the muzzle of my revolver," I answered. "Look, here we are on the wrong street—we must cut across somehow to the next."

"And then?"

"Then we shall be directly in front of the consulate."

"It must be done. Look behind there—you can see we have only a moment. Shall we try this alley? It may take us through."

The alley was a narrow passage between two of the largest houses I ever remember observing in Panompin. It was dark at the entrance and barely wide enough for us both to walk abreast, but down at the further end a flickering light dimly burned.

Positively I can't say whether I gave assent or not; I only remember that the next moment we were running along the alley and I was beginning to fancy that we had

given our pursuers the slip, when my hopes were dashed by hearing their shouts behind us. Klings, Chinamen and Cambodians were pouring into the alley like sheep.

The situation had now grown desperate. My singular companion saw this as well as I.

"Too bad! too bad!" he muttered. "My plans are ruined. See, friend, we've made another blunder. Here's a wall which neither of us can climb."

I gave an exclamation of disgust, for directly in front of us stretched the wall, a good twelve feet high, cutting off our retreat completely. We had run into a veritable *cul-de-sac.*

"It means fight now!" I exclaimed. "I'll stand by you. Are you armed?"

"No, no! If I was I would not shoot down one of those poor wretches for the world."

"You must do something quickly."

"And you?"

"I am not afraid of them."

"I wish I could help you," he said, eyeing me strangely. "If you do not fear for yourself, I fear for you. I am the taller. Perhaps I can spring up and catch the top of the wall and so pull you after me."

He dropped the hand bag upon the ground and leaped up, missing the coping of the wall.

"No use!" he exclaimed. "They are here! May God help you my friend, I cannot—therefore I leave you. A thousand thanks for your kind intentions. Farewell!"

What ailed me—what ailed my man with the parti-colored face?

It would have been useless to ask me then, for at that time even the claims of the Buddhist adepts were unknown to me.

If any one had attempted to describe what happened as something actually having taken place, who would have been readier than I to set him down as a lying imposter or a fool ; and yet—

But I find it quite impossible to speak as I could wish. Here is what occurred under the wall at the end of the alley, as I saw it—nothing less, nothing more.

Astonished at the words of my strange companion, knowing as I knew that the next moment must bring me face to face with the mob even then rushing down the alley, I was

about to speak, when it suddenly struck me that the man's face had undergone a change.

It was growing thin and shadowy, his whole body also seemed to be assuming a certain vapory indistinctness, to become etherealized, so to speak.

As he stood there motionless before the wall, I gazed at him in speechless amazement. Was it actually as I saw it, or was the trouble with my own brain?

He seemed to be sinking slowly downward, his feet and legs disappeared, seemingly dissolving as he went, until nothing but the head rested on the ground.

I was horrified, amazed beyond all telling.

Meanwhile every surrounding object retained its distinctness—the lantern above the wall burned as brightly as before.

From that dreadful head I struggled to remove my gaze in vain. Thinner and still more shadowy it became, until suddenly, as a puff of wind wafts away the last flickering flame of a burnt-out candle, it vanished.

The man had faded away before my eyes, leaving me to face the mob alone.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOWS OF THE NAGKON WAT.

THE mists still hung thick above the forests when we reached a resting place on those seemingly interminable steps and leaned panting for breath against the embrasure of one of the little windows up near the top of the grand central pagoda of the Nagkon Wat. Far below us—two hundred and fifty feet is said to be the height of the pagoda—lay the tropical jungle, with its nodding atap palms alive with the screams of monkeys, the notes of peacocks, quails and parrots, a dense mass of green stretching off as far as the eye could reach. At our feet was the inner court of that strange old temple, the very name of whose builders is lost in the mists of ages, the sloping roofs, projecting cornices and crumbling columns gilded by the first rays of the rising sun.

"Too late!" exclaimed Maurice De Veber; "too late

George; old Sol is up before us. Next time you arouse me from my peaceful slumbers to witness a Siamese sunrise, I shall know enough to refuse to lend myself to your mad schemes. Why there's not a particle of breath left in my body, to say nothing of the condition of my legs."

"Peaceful slumbers, indeed!" I replied, contemptuously. "For my part, what with the mosquitoes and the howling of the jackals I haven't slept a wink all night. Who was it, pray, that insisted upon dragging me two hundred miles into the wilderness to visit those miserable ruins? And now you complain because I make you share my discomforts. Come, Maurice, that's not fair."

Maurice laughed.

"My friend," he said, "I take it all back. It's grand, it's glorious! I am beginning to breathe now, and my legs are rapidly returning to their normal condition. It is worth two years of a man's life to gaze upon this view ten minutes. I for one do not regret my climb."

But as for myself, I was indifferent. Two months had elapsed since my singular adventure in the streets of Pan-ompin. Two months more had been given me to forget my troubles, yet they had not been forgotten. I needed something besides the dreamy existence I had been leading in the society of my friend Maurice De Veber to drive them from my thoughts.

On that night my escape from the mob had been less difficult than might be supposed.

It was not me they were after; besides they took me for a Frenchman, I fancy, and to interfere with a Frenchman in Cambodia would be a very dangerous matter.

When at last I succeeded in pushing my way through the excited throng and found myself at the door of the American consulate, I discovered that I still held the little hand bag which had been dropped by the stranger and which I must have picked up, although I have no recollection of having done anything of the sort.

I was dazed—absolutely confounded.

What I had seen I had seen. In one moment that man with his peculiar face had stood before me; his eyes had looked into my eyes; he had spoken; he had pressed my hand; and in the next he had disappeared as completely as if he had never been.

Where? How?

Absolutely there was no explanation of the mystery; and the next day when I visited the alley, making a most critical examination, I found myself still further mystified.

At its end was the wall which the man had failed to climb. On the right rose the solid bamboo side of a Chinese merchant's warehouse, while on the left was the side wall of another warehouse, and as both faced the other street with neither window or door opening on the alley, what conclusion was I to draw?

"Pshaw! The sun has affected your head George," said Maurice when I told him about it. "You had better take a dose of quinine and keep indoors out of the night air. The fellow may have had a most extraordinary birth-mark, I'm willing to admit, but you may be sure he managed to scale the wall while you were looking back at that crowd. Probably he'll turn up to-day and claim his bag, explaining the whole affair."

But he did not.

Day after day elapsed and still nothing was heard of the man.

I fairly forced poor Maurice into making inquiries about him, and he, as American consul at Panompin, had every facility for gaining information if it was to be had.

A few persons had observed a tall, peculiar appearing man, with the lower part of his face concealed under a black cloth, walking along the main street of Panompin that night, but no one was able to furnish the slightest information as to who he was, or where he came from; nor could I convince myself that anyone had seen him after he left me at the end of the alley in that strange and altogether unaccountable fashion.

Meanwhile the days came and went. Maurice busy with his consular engagements grew tired of hearing me talk about the affair, and so I ceased to mention it. I hung the bag upon a nail in my sleeping room, but as it was locked, I made no attempt to open it, for I have a particular dislike to prying into other people's business—besides it was very light and probably contained nothing but a change of clothing.

In fact the matter had begun to fade from my memory, and growing tired of the monotonous, idle life I was leading at Panompin, I was planning to go to Calcutta with the idea of engaging in business, when one afternoon Maurice burst into the room where I sat reading, blurting out:

"Now then, old fellow, here's something to make you forget your troubles. I have the promise of a passage in a steamer bound up to lake Thalaysap and the Siamrap river. I am going to take a month's vacation and visit the world-famed ruins of Angkor—will you go along?

"Go!"

Why I would have gone to the South Pole with Maurice De Veber willingly, and yet he was only a chance aquaintance, after all.

We had met two years before on a steamer plying between Swatow and Hong Kong, to which latter port I was bound upon certain official business, I had been attracted by his manly figure, dark, handsome face, and regular features. from the moment I first laid eyes on him at the supper table, just after we left Swatow; and when I found he was an American and a New Yorker, of course an acquaintance sprang up at once.

Maurice was a splendid fellow; positively my ideal of young American manhood. What, therefore, did it matter that I had seen forty years and he not more than twenty-five?

You see there was a great void in my heart waiting to be filled by some one. It was the place my wife might have filled, should have filled, but at that time the very sight of womankind was disgusting to me. I execrated the sex; in my lonely hours of self-communion I had brought my mind into that condition where I looked upon every married man as one to be pitied; where I longed for my vanished youth and its opportunities, where I reversed the order of nature, and despising the affection of woman, sighed for that of the brother or the faithful friend. Positively my mental state, just then, must have bordered upon insanity, for I never had but one brother and he was a drunkard and a most precious rascal, and as for my early friends there was not one I could name who had not used me in a shameful way.

Long before we reached Hong Kong I stood ready to give Maurice De Veber my head if he had asked it, and I know that I made myself noticeable by the way I followed him about.

Still he seemed to like it without making the least pretence of returning the absurd affection which I could scarcely help displaying for him.

Possibly some one had said to him, "that old fellow

Wylde is as rich as a Jew." I should not wonder, for there were those on board who knew me, and the snug little fortune left me by my father had been greatly exaggerated among my associates in China. Indeed, I often thought of that, and I found the thought making me so miserable that I was positively relieved when we reached Hong Kong and our intimacy was broken off.

"Good-bye," said Maurice, as I took leave of him on the deck of the Singapore steamer, in which he had taken passage for Saigon, from there to proceed to Panompin, where he had just been appointed consul. "Good-bye! If you get tired of Swatow take a run down to Cambodia and pay me a visit. Bring Mrs. Wylde with you and I'll promise to entertain you both as well as a poor bachelor can."

Well, when the crisis came, I took the run down to Cambodia, but I did *not* bring Mrs. Wylde.

Of course I am morbid. I know it. Very likely if I had been different my wife would have been different. There are those who do not hesitate to say so, and doubtless they are right.

But I am what my hereditary tendencies have made me; or perhaps I should say, what, by a careful fostering of those tendencies, I have made myself. I had longed to be free from the chains which held me down, but now that freedom had actually come I found myself bound by chains still more powerful—regret for what had been, thoughts of what might have been, sad memories of the past.

Not but what Maurice tried to make life pleasant for me at Panompin.

He did everything that a man could do, and I honestly believe that by this time he had conceived as sincere an affection for me as it is possible for a young man to feel for a comparative stranger so much his senior.

Indeed, I believe that the trip to Angkor was arranged for my especial benefit, for it was I and not he who had expressed a desire to visit that wonderful city of the ancient Buddhists, which has lain buried in the dense forests of Cambodia for more years than man can count.

We were off within an hour, for the opportunity had presented itself suddenly and had to be embraced at once if at all. Indeed, our departure from Panompin was so hasty that we had barely time to throw together the necessary articles of clothing, leaving our heavier baggage to be

brought up by Maurice's Chinese servant, in a native boat, which was to go up to the lake on the following day.

This was the dawning of our fourth day at the ruins—the others had been spent in exploring the great temple, studying its bas-reliefs and unreadable inscriptions, silent memorials of a forgotten race.

Yes, the enjoyment should have been all mine, not his; and to a certain extent it was so. Even in my unhappy frame of mind I could not gaze down from that height unawed at the mighty monuments of a lost people which lay beneath us; nevertheless they had failed to amuse me as I had hoped.

"Hark!" exclaimed Maurice suddenly, as we stood there gazing off upon that ocean of green, tinged at the horizon with a broad dash of orange, deepening in its lower lines into crimson; "hark, George! Don't you hear some one on the platform above us? I am certain I heard a step."

"I thought I heard something a moment or two ago," I replied, "but I hear nothing now."

"Nor I, but I did as I spoke."

"It is very unlikely that any of those lazy priests can have gone up before us," said I, alluding to the dull-eyed old Cambodians, who, dwelling in the group of low thatched huts far below us, have charge of the temple. "Unless something special calls them they have shown no anxiety to leave their rice and betel since we've been at Angkor."

"True, George; and yet I heard——"

"What my dear fellow?"

"Some one praying, I think—at least it sounded that way, though I couldn't understand the words."

"Then your hearing is a precious sight more acute than mine, Maurice," I answered. "I thought I heard some one shuffling about on the platform above us, but praying—nonsense! Don't fancy those fellows would climb that terrible stairway simply to mutter a prayer which could be just as well mumbled before the big statue of Buddha in the room below."

Maurice laughed shortly and leaning forward attempted to look up to the next platform above. He was, however, able to distinguish nothing.

Understand the design of the three great towers of the Nagkon Wat; it is necessary for the full comprehension of that which is to follow. Briefly I may describe them as

vast, circular stone terraces, platform placed upon platform, each slightly receding from the one beneath, until the apex of the cone is reached. The central and largest of these remarkable piles, Maurice, when he first caught a glimpse of it, compared to a huge Papal tiara— no inapt comparison, by the way, for it certainly looked more like that than anything else. In spite of the distance we had climbed, there still remained three of the platforms to be passed before the top could be reached.

"George, you don't know these Buddhist priests," Maurice said musingly. "Lazy and indifferent as they appear, they are the most inveterate fanatics on earth. If it were a part of their religion to witness the sunrise from the top of this tower on this particular day, they would move heaven and earth to get here—they would crawl up step by step on their knees, if they could gain their end in no other way."

"I saw enough of them in China, to understand pretty well what they are like," I replied.

"Indeed you did not. The Chinese Buddhists are different. With them religion has little or no meaning. Like some of our Christians they make it but a fetich; a bald formula of words and ceremonies which they are alike too ignorant and too indifferent to understand."

"And are these people different?" I asked skeptically.

"Very different. I have made a study of them since I have been in Cambodia. Of course with the masses it is the same the world over. The Chinese are too practical, too worldly to make deep spiritual thinkers, but among the higher classes of Buddhists in Farther India there are minds capable of the deepest metaphysical reflection; minds stored with an accumulation of spiritual knowledge such as you and I are utterly unable to comprehend."

"Bosh!" I exclaimed, lighting a cheroot. "Why to hear you talk, old fellow, one would think you were a convert to Buddhism. What are these Buddhists but a parcel of ignorant idolators, worshiping gods of wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor think nor smell, as the Scripture says somewhere. Positively, Maurice, you surprise me—you do indeed."

He sighed, gazing upon my face with a certain far-away look that I had often observed in his eyes, and had as often set down to a morbid dreaminess of character which he certainly possessed at times. Thrusting his hands into his

vest pocket he pulled out a small silver coin, a piece a little smaller than our American quarter dollar, and passed it over to me. Upon one side it bore a representation of the zodiacal constellation *pisces*, on the other were Persian characters, the meaning of which I was, of course, unable to understand.

"George, what is that?" he asked in the same dreamy fashion.

"One of your Hindoo coins, of course," I answered, wondering what he was driving at. "I think you told me it was one of a series called the Zodiac rupees."

"Precisely. I told you so, and having faith in me you believe my assertion."

"Certainly."

"Would you have known that those seemingly unmeaning marks on the reverse were Persian letters if I had not told you?"

"No; but of course I should have known they were Oriental letters of some sort."

"Very likely; because so far and no further has your education in such matters advanced. But suppose you were to take that coin and show it to a New York longshoreman who did not know you, and consequently had no faith in you; suppose you were to assure him that those marks were letters, what conclusion do you suppose he would draw?"

"Either that I was making sport of him or that I was a fool."

"Then there you have it. As the longshoreman is to the coin so are we to the Buddhist philosophic acumen of the East. To our minds their doctrines are rubbish, absurd to the last degree. Why? Simply because we are incapable of comprehending them; because we are wholly unaccustomed to their methods of thought. Remember this much; when our forefathers were savages, these people were enjoying the height of a glorious civilization. When the naked Britons drove the hosts of Cæsar into the sea, Angkor was old, and, for all we know, even then deserted. George, it required a motive to build this massive pile, as well as unlimited treasure, architectural skill and physical strength. What was that motive? Religion! A profound sense of the littleness of man and the greatness of the God who constructed the mighty temple of the universe; call

him Jehovah, call him Buddha, Brahma, or by whatever name you please."

"Bravo!" I cried. "Bravo! Positively I never imagined that I had in my friend so profound a thinker, an adept, a philosopher! Then you don't regard the Buddhists as idolators, it seems?"

"No more than you are, no more than I am. I speak only of the educated. Long before I left America I entertained these views, and since my residence in the East I have seen much to confirm me in them; but—"

"But not enough to make you willing to credit the mysterious disappearance of my friend with the parti-colored face?" I answered, somewhat sneeringly. "You made game of that, you know."

"I own that I did, but it was because I did not care to enter into a discussion upon these matters at the time. Your state of mind was not such as to make it desirable that I should do so. It is hardly otherwise now, and I regret—George, there certainly is some one on the platform above us. Hark!"

No need to call my attention. What Maurice heard I heard—could not help hearing. A deep voice had broken out above us, singing, or rather chanting the lines which follow.

Coming suddenly as it did, close upon Maurice's learned disquisition on Buddhism, every word is as firmly graven on my memory as though heard only yesterday, instead of many long years ago. Let me add that the words were English, as perfectly pronounced as if chanted by myself.

"Lo! in the East comes a glow as of rubies;
Jewels magnificent flash in the sky,
Heralding thee, O King of the morning,
Golden hued sun to gladden the eye.

Hail to thee, Sun God, ruler omnipotent!
Salute we thy coming in splendor and fire,
Low bow we down as thy glory illumes us,
Lord of the earth, our ruler and sire.

Dark is the world when thou hast departed,
Lonely and desolate lies the broad plain,
Mountain and valley awaiting in sadness,
Smile when thy face beams upon them again."

The song ceased. As the last echo died away, the shadowy mists which had hitherto hung over the horizon

were suddenly dispelled and the sun shown forth in all its glory.

Turning my face upward, I, at the same instant, caught sight of a shadow upon the platform above.

It was but a glimpse—then it was drawn back and had vanished.

But that glimpse showed me a man bending over the balustrade.

Instantly I knew him.

It was my mysterious friend at Panompin— the man with the parti-colored face!

CHAPTER III.

MORE MYSTERY.

"MAURICE!" I cried, grasping my friend's arm. "Maurice, did you see?"

"See—what? I saw a man leaning over the balustrade up there. Some visitor at the ruins like ourselves."

"Maurice!" I exclaimed in a hurried whisper," it was that man."

"What man?"

"My 'levitating' friend, as you call him."

"No, George! Never!"

But it was though. Didn't you see his face? It was uncovered—half yellow, half black."

"The sun must have been in my eyes or yours. I saw nothing of the sort; but to tell the truth I didn't see his face plainly. Just as I caught a glimpse of it, presto, it was gone."

Strange sensations seized me. I trembled, though I knew not why.

"If it is actually your Panompin friend, George, by all means let us go up and interview him," said Maurice lightly. "His song, though a trifle high flown, was not so bad. Do you know I like that idea of sun worship. God is omnipotent, omnipresent, but invisible. He made the earth, but the sun was his master mechanic. By all means let us be sun worshipers, old fellow, but for heaven's sake,

don't drag me into any discussion with your friend upstairs. Such thoughts as I unfolded to you a few moments ago belong to certain frames of mind in which I seldom indulge. If you transgress, don't be surprised to find me roughly repudiating all I said. I'm in no mood to argue with a Buddhist adept to-day."

"My lips are sealed," I replied, "but first we have to 'catch our hare,' who knows that we may not find that my singular friend has levitated to parts unknown. Then the laugh *will* be on your side, and that's a fact."

"We'll see! We'll see!" exclaimed Maurice, pushing on ahead of me. "If he is still there I'm as eager to interview him as you can be, for—hark! He *is* there!"

It was true.

We had reached the level of the next platform now, and there, leaning against a sculptured column with arms folded across his breast, stood the object of our thoughts.

Involuntarily we paused and peered out through the doorway communicating with the platform.

As he stood gazing in deep meditation off upon the dense forest there was something grand and majestic in his very attitude.

To Maurice the sight of that face must have been a marvel; to me it now seemed so much a part of the man that I could no longer regard it as hideous, nor even strange.

"What's his name?" breathed Maurice in my ear. "You want to introduce a fellow, you know."

I made no answer, for that same cold shudder had come over me again. What could it mean? Could it be that I, the confirmed agnostic was wavering in my agnosticism? For I found myself wondering if I was about to address a being from another and unseen world.

Determined to divest myself of all such nonsense, I now strode forward with outstretched hand.

"Good morning!" I said boldly. "It strikes me we have had the pleasure of meeting before."

He did not at first change his position—simply turned and surveyed me calmly. Then unfolding his arms he extended his hand and grasped mine just as I was about to withdraw it, pressing it in that hearty fashion that I have always made a point to adopt myself.

"Ah! my Panompin friend!" he exclaimed. "Positively this is a surprise and a pleasant one. How came you here?"

It struck me very forcibly that mine was the right to ask that question, but I concealed my thoughts, and explained briefly the object of my visit to Angkor.

"It is a wonderful place," he replied. "Few are aware of its existence and fewer still appreciate its beauties. But your friend here—introduce me please. By the way, our last interview was interrupted so abruptly that I had no opportunity to learn your name."

My eye was full upon him when he made that allusion to our adventure in the alley, but he showed by no outward sign that he did not consider his strange departure the most natural thing in the world.

"I am George Wylde," I replied, "and this is Mr. Maurice De Veber, American Consul at Panompin, to whose residence we were on our way when—when——"

"When I was forced to bid you farewell in a most summary manner," he interrupted with perfect coolness. "Mr. Wylde, I am most happy to meet you again. Mr. De Veber, I trust that you are enjoying life in Cambodia. You are both Americans, I presume."

"We are—and New Yorkers."

"A fine city. Greatly improved of late I am told. It is some years since my last visit there. You Americans are an enterprising, practical people, but——"

"But what?"

"I was about to add that like all children you possess a somewhat exaggerated idea of your own intelligence," he answered, smilingly, "but I had no intention of giving offense—let it pass."

"You are quite right there, according to my friend's views," I laughed; "but pardon me, so far our introduction has been somewhat one-sided. May I ask your name?"

"My name! Well, strictly speaking, I have four names. Two are unpronouncable for you Americans. In Calcutta I am known as Mr. Mirrikh, and that must answer here."

As he spoke he thrust his hand into one of the inner pockets of his coat, and producing a strip of black silk proceeded to adjust it about the lower part of his face.

He made neither explanation nor the least allusion to this act, and when the silk was in position, stood before us as calmly as ever, evidently waiting for me to speak.

It was Maurice, however, who began.

"You speak of Calcutta; are you a Hindoo, Mr. Mirrikh?"

"No, sir."

"Pardon me. You can scarcely be a Cambodian or Siamese. Persian, perhaps?"

"Neither one nor the other, sir. We will let that matter pass."

Maurice turned slightly red. The dear fellow never could endure rebuff.

"Do you smoke?" he asked, producing his cigar case.

"Seldom, and I do not care to smoke now. Pardon me, Mr. De Veber, if I have given offense. I can assure you——"

"In refusing my vile cheroots, sir? Indeed no."

"No, no; not that. In declining to disclose my nationality. Believe me the best of reasons exist why I should keep my secret. To all intents and purposes I am a citizen of Benares. I have resided there 'off and on,' as you Americans say, for some years."

"No explanation is necessary, sir," replied Maurice, lightly. "My question was an impertinent one, but you know I must maintain my reputation for Yankee curiosity. But to change the subject; when did you arrive at Angkor? We have been here four days and, but for the priests, thought we had the ruins to ourselves."

"I arrived this morning, Mr. De Veber," he answered, the curious shadow which passed over his face telling me that Maurice was treading on dangerous ground again.

"This morning! Why there was no party in this morning before we left. You could hardly have come up the lake, for I am expecting some one on the next boat due. Possibly you came over from Siamrap?"

"Mr. De Veber, I came from a different direction entirely."

"Indeed! May I ask from where?"

"Yankee curiosity again?" he laughed. "Really it is too bad, but I am forced to disappoint you. My movements cannot possibly concern you. I prefer not to tell from which direction I came."

It was too much for Maurice.

Biting his lip he moved toward the balustrade and remained looking down upon the temple roof below.

Scarcely was his back turned when Mr. Mirrikh—I adopt the name he gave us—moved to my side and drew me back toward the door.

"I am sorry, very sorry," he said in a low voice, "to have offended your friend a second time, but I assure you it was out of my power to answer his question."

"Which should not have been asked," I replied. "The fault is his. He is over sensitive. In a moment he will have forgotten—say no more."

"Not upon that subject since you wish it; but I must speak with you upon another while opportunity offers. That little hand bag of mine—you recollect. Have you it with you here at Angkor?"

"Unfortunately no;" I took it in charge that night, but it was left behind us at Panompin. Of course I never dreamed—?"

"Of meeting me—certainly not. Why should you? I was engaged in a peculiar mission at Panompin and was particularly anxious not to—that is to say not to leave hurriedly. But tell me—and you must think me very rude for not inquiring sooner—how did you manage to escape?"

"Now it is you who are asking questions. If I answer, I must take the liberty of asserting my Yankee prerogative of asking you the same question in return."

He smiled strangely—you can scarcely fancy what a singular sensation it is to see a man smile only with his eyes.

"I am dumb," he said, "but one question I must ask—were you harmed?"

"Not in the least."

"Good! I am thankful for it. I have many times thought of you—but to return to the bag."

"It's at your disposal," I interposed. "If you are going to Panompin—"

"But I am not. It is doubtful if I ever visit the place again. When you return will you oblige me by addressing a label to Mr. Radma Gungeet, at Benares, and forwarding the bag by express?"

"Certainly. It shall be done if you wish it."

"One question more. Do not be offended. Did you open the bag, thinking you would never see me again?"

"The bag has remained precisely as you left it, sir," I replied with dignity.

He gave a slight sigh of relief and turned away just in time to meet Maurice coming toward us from the balustrade.

"Come, George, let's go down," he said abruptly. "Mr. Mirrikh, I bid you good day."

"Stay—one moment. We part friends?"

He extended his hand which Maurice took.

"Certainly. There is no reason why we should not. I can't help being a Yankee any more than you a—well, whatever you are. Come and join us at dinner. We are in the last room of the north wing, and have as fine a Chinese cook as Cambodia can afford."

"I should be most happy, but it will be quite impossible. Frankly, gentlemen, I am something of a Buddhist. My visit to the Nagkon Wat is for a religious purpose which renders it necessary for me to fast."

"In which case we shall have to excuse you," said Maurice lightly. "At all events promise to see us before you leave."

"I promise that. You shall certainly see me."

"When?"

"That is more than I can say. Hark! Do I hear someone singing? Gentlemen, I must leave you. As you may easily imagine, my peculiar deformity," he pronounced the word with an emphasis almost sarcastic, "makes me shy of strangers. Good day."

Yes, there was some one coming, we could hear the sound of footsteps ascending the stone stairs within the tower, and a rich baritone voice singing—not an ode to the sun god this time, though certainly something akin to it—the good old fisherman's chorus from Auber's pleasing, but well-nigh forgotten, opera, Masaniello.

"More visitors!" cried Maurice

"Evidently, and I am off. I cannot meet them," said Mr. Mirrikh.

Waving his hand politely, he drew back through the doorway, disappearing in the dark shadow beyond.

"Why, the man will run right into this newcomer, whoever he is," cried Maurice. He started to follow, but I caught his arm and drew him back.

"Don't," I whispered. "Whoever he is, or whatever he is, he is certainly a gentleman. Respect his wishes and let him go."

"Bother!" said Maurice, pulling himself away. "He called me a Yankee, let me show him I've got my share of Yankee curiosity. Come on George, I intend to find out where he goes."

And he stepped through the door, leaving me to follow or not, as I pleased.

I chose to follow, for I confess that my curiosity had gained the better of my politeness.

Was the strange episode at Panompin about to be repeated, and in broad daylight? Meanwhile, the singing continued, though the sound of footsteps had ceased, and we knew that the new comer must have paused on the platform below.

There were still two platforms above us. We listened, but could hear no footsteps on the stairs.

"He must have gone up," whispered Maurice; "Yes, by gracious! there he goes now."

Even as he spoke, we caught sight of Mr. Mirrikh's back vanishing around a turn in the winding stairs.

"Stop!" I whispered. "Maurice, at least let us be decent."

"I won't! If he don't want to meet strangers, neither do we. Come on."

He crept up the stairs, and I followed him. When we turned the corner there was nothing to be seen of Mirrikh; nor was he on the first platform when we gained it, nor yet on the second and last. Now nothing but a huge cylindrical stone remained above us—nothing save that and the sky.

"Holy smoke!" cried Maurice, dropping into American slang in his excitement. "George, the fellow ain't here!"

"Evidently not. Now, my friend, perhaps you will be willing to believe me that I was neither drunk nor dreaming that night at Panompin. Too much samschow! Too many Manilla cheroots! All a hallucination—I believe that was the way you talked."

"Shut up!" cried Maurice, half angrily. "This is a mighty serious matter."

"Awake! Awake! the morn is freshly breaking!" roared the singer on the balcony below.

"Perdition seize the fellow!" snapped Maurice. "George, where in the mischief do you suppose that man Mirrikh has taken himself to? I will understand this business, I swear I will."

"Levitated, of course," I replied ironically. "These Buddhist adepts are wonderful fellows, you know. Why, they have the London *Times* at Benares every morning within ten seconds of the moment of issue. Railroads they never trouble. If they want to go to Calcutta, Paris or New York, they simply levitate—I'm growing fond of that word,

it rolls so easily off the tongue. Levitated—that's it, you may depend."

"George," said Maurice solemnly, "you are making light of a serious matter. From my remarks made awhile ago, you have a perfect right to consider me not only a super-religious sort of fellow, but a theosophist as well. Now, the fact is, I am neither one nor the other. I am simply a confirmed investigator. The truth is what I want, and what I am determined to have. Therefore I undertook to investigate Buddhism, and I was amazed at what I found in its much misrepresented doctrines. Nevertheless, I believe only what appeals to my reason and to my senses. Levitation does neither, and yet—well, to cut it short, where the deuce has that fellow gone to? That's what I want to know."

"Where did he go the night he left me at the end of the alley?" I demanded triumphantly.

"Through some secret door, I presume. There was chance enough."

"Was there? You yourself searched and could find no such outlet, but it would not be at all out of the way to imagine both a secret door and a hidden staircase in this ruined pile."

"That's it! That's it!" cried Maurice; "unless he is a second Elijah he can have left this tower in no other way."

I was looking down as Maurice made this remark; gazing into the interior court yard behind the Nagkon Wat, a space surrounded by low, crumbling stone structures, any one of which, even if we had run down stairs at the top of our speed, it would have taken us a good ten minutes to reach.

Five had not elapsed since the disappearance of Mr. Mirrikh—I doubt greatly if it was more than three.

"Look! Look!" I cried, suddenly seizing Maurice by the arm. "Look! Now will you believe?"

"Great God! It is the man himself!"

He was as pale as death as these words burst from his lips, and even I felt that strange cold thrill pass through my frame again.

I remember hearing the voice of the singer drawing nearer—of being conscious that he was coming up the last of the stairs and we must encounter him in a moment more. Yet I thought nothing of this now. How could it be

expected, when looking down into the courtyard of the Nagkon Wat I saw the mysterious Mr. Mirrikh standing at the head of a short flight of steps between the columns of a massive portico.

As we gazed, he lifted his eyes toward the tower and saw us.

Raising his hand he waved it lightly in our direction, bowed, and passing into the shadows of the door-way disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR REVEREND GUEST.

I WISH I possessed that great gift, "a facile pen."

How I would like to describe that glorious sunrise in the elegant and finely rounded periods of a Bulwer; to discourse upon the antiquity of that mighty and mysterious temple with the confident assurance of a Lenormant or a Lyell.

Or even were I gifted with the power of stringing flowery phrases, how poetic could I grow about the balmy air, the thrilling songsters whose notes now began to fill the forest, the nodding palms and delicious odors wafted past us on our lofty perch with each breeze that blew.

But pshaw! I am neither poet nor novelist; history I hate, and science I abhor. I am only a plain, every day American; a little brushed up by foreign travel, perhaps; but neither brighter nor better read than the average of my race.

Thus, as Maurice De Veber truly remarked, I am incapable of comprehending the mystical; my mind and thought methods are unadapted to the tenets of Buddhist theology.

Even now that my knowledge has advanced in this direction; even now that I know of that knowledge and must believe because I know, because I have seen and heard, I find myself still incapable of so expressing my thoughts to others as to carry conviction with my statements. But after all, that is a gift, and one which few men possess.

Here was I brought face to face with a man and a mystery. A man more mysterious even than the temple in which we

had met. A man whose facial appearance violated all the laws of ethnology; a man seemingly possessed of powers which opposed physical law. Yet now that my friend had seen what I had seen, I found myself forced to admit the truth of that which for weeks past I had been trying to persuade myself was but the outgrowth of an over morbid mind.

"George! George! You saw him?" cried Maurice, staring down at the portico through which Mr. Mirrikh had disappeared.

"Decidedly I saw him. And you—now you are forced to admit that my experience at Panompin was no dream?"

"I admit nothing. All my life—that is ever since I was old enough to read and think—I have longed to be a witness to something of this sort. But, George, once seeing is not enough to convince me that the man exists who can set at naught the laws of nature. I must see and see, test and re-test again and again. I admit the possibility—no more."

"But," I began, "such business is done by others than Buddhists. Our modern Spiritualists for instance——"

"Oh bother the modern Spiritualists!" he exclaimed impatiently. "There is something different here from your vulgar table tipping, spirit rappings and banjo playings. How did that man get down from this tower? George, I tell you my dear fellow—pshaw! we can talk no longer now!"

He was right. The moment had come when our attention was to be distracted.

Quick footsteps were heard upon the topmost stairs and the full, rich voice of the singer drew nearer. An instant later and we were no longer alone. The singing ceased, a man stepped out upon the platform and advanced to where we stood.

"Ah! So I am not the only one who has had the courage to brave these infernal stairs!" he exclaimed. "Good morning, gentlemen. English I perceive, or American. My name is Philpot—Miles Philpot. I am glad to meet you—glad to meet any one capable of speaking the only respectable language on God's footstool—I am indeed."

Let me describe him. It must be done, and the sooner we are through with introductions the sooner my strange story may be told.

A man of forty years, perhaps, of medium height, slightly inclined to corpulency, with brown hair, big, bulging blue

eyes and smooth shaven, florid cheeks, stood before us with outstretched hand.

The face was an intelligent one, and yet there was about the mouth a certain sneering expresssion which repelled me. I thought then—and afterward I knew it to be true—that here was a man who had drunk of life's pleasures to the dregs ; a man who had seen everything and forgotten nothing ; whose life had been a moral failure ; one who had lacked sufficient tenacity of purpose to make life a pecuniary success.

And yet why I should thus have estimated him, I scarcely know.

Certainly his dress did not warrant the drawing of any such conclusion.

A suit of rusty black ; a waistcoat with innumerable little buttons extending from a dirty collar turned "hindside foremost," as Maurice put it, and a broad brimmed straw hat all went to indicate a Church of England clergyman. No ; it was the face. That spoke louder than broadcloth and buttons. There was no spirituality there.

Maurice was the first to recover himself from the somewhat confused condition of mind into which this abrupt, though not unexpected interruption had thrown us, and taking the proffered hand, he returned the greeting with more warmth than I, under the circumstances, could have displayed.

"Glad to meet you, sir!" he said heartily. "I am Maurice De Veber ; this is Mr. George Wylde, my friend. It is unnecessary to ask if you are our countryman, Mr. Philpot. Your manner speaks too plainly. You are an American, of course."

The new comer laughed lightly.

Ah, how many times was I destined to hear that light, sneering laugh in the weeks to come.

"On the contrary," he replied, "I am an Englishman. There, don't stare! Don't expect me to be a boor in consequence. Don't look round for my bath-tub, my valet, hat box and travelling rug. I said I was an Englishman—so I am by birth, and I am proud of it; but I am prouder still of being a citizen of the world, and of having spent the best part of my life in the United States. Gentlemen, to all intents and purposes I *am* an American. You have hit the nail squarely on the head."

"Singular words for one of your cloth, sir," I replied with a slight tinge of sarcasm.

"Cloth! Well you are right. I am a Reverend, boys, but the title is about all there is left of it. I have enjoyed many charges and lost them all, and that which I have now is not a charge! Ha! ha! It is only an existence. Being deprived of a charge does not deprive me of the right to live. Briefly, I am a reformed parson. I am sponging on the world."

He removed his hat and wiped his perspiring brow, gazing off upon the vast sea of green below us with an expression of admiration which told me that his thoughts were not all as trivial as he seemed to wish us to believe.

"Glorious—ain't it?" he exclaimed. "I had often read of it and I was bound to see it. Well, here I am at Angkor at last, and now the Lord knows where I shall drift to next."

"What part of the States are you from?" I ventured.

"New York, last; lived ten years in Chicago; besides that have trotted about from Maine to Texas. As you Yankees say, I kinder guess I've seen about all your country has to show."

"When did you reach Angkor?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Surely you did not come up the river?"

"No, I came through from Siamrap with a little party of natives. Came to Siamrap from Bangkok, to Bangkok from Calcutta. I am travelling because I like to travel. If I see anything odd I jot it down. I've written one book and may write another. Can't promise though, for I'm too lazy, and that's the truth. Gentlemen, have either of you got anything to smoke? Unfortunately, I left my pipe with my traps below."

I passed him my cheroot case and Maurice supplied the match. As soon as the light was taken he began rattling on in the same strain.

"Let me see, haven't I heard of you before, Mr. De Veber? Strikes me I have. You are consul somewhere—let me see, Macao, ain't it? No, Panompin?"

"Panompin is the spot," said Maurice, quietly.

"Ah, yes! Knew I'd seen your name mentioned in some register or another. Dull hole that. I was there last year. Was introduced to that royal beggar, King Norodom. Spent

a whole evening trying to drink him under the table. No go, though. I was only too glad to get out at last."

"You have been in the East some time then?" I remarked

"Oh yes; a matter of a few years. They sent me out as a missionary, but bless you, I couldn't stand it. I had a charge near Rangoon—bored the very life out of me. Luckily I fell heir to a few pounds just about that time, so I took to knocking round again. The fact is, gentlemen, I've knocked round so much in my time that I'm fit for nothing else."

"Did you happen to knock against a man—a Hindoo—wearing a black cloth over the lower part of his face, on your way over from Siamrap?" demanded Maurice, turning suddenly upon him.

"No; I saw no such person. I was the only man in the party outside of the bearers and the guide."

"And you arrived?"

"Half an hour ago, as I just told you."

"How long were you at Siamrap?"

"Two days. But pardon me—what are you driving at?"

"One moment. Coming up here did you meet any one on the stairs going down?"

"No; the priests told me there were two English gentlemen at the ruins and your man informed me that you had gone up into the tower so I expected to meet you, but I met no one on the way up."

"Might not some one have passed you while you stopped on the platform where we heard you singing?"

"Scarcely. I was there only a moment. I should have heard him, and my very highly developed bump of curiosity would most certainly have prompted me to look round."

Then, to my surprise, Maurice just blurted out the whole affair.

I was disgusted—half angry. I tried to stop him, but in vain.

"It's no use, George," he said. "I am determined to fathom this mystery. If your friend Mirrikh did not come to Angkor up the river then he must have come from Siamrap, for there is no other way of getting here unless through the forest. I want to know where he came from and by what means he left this tower. It is not fair to question Mr. Philpot so closely without letting him understand the whole matter."

During Maurice's animated and somewhat highly colored description of the scene in the alley and that upon the tower, the reverend gentleman maintained perfect silence.

He seemed impressed with my friend's manner, half amused at his earnestness, but at each allusion to the remarkable disappearances of Mr. Mirrikh, that same sneering smile crept over his face. His glances at Maurice were half in pity it seemed to me.

"You may question me as much as you please, Mr. De Veber," he said, after Maurice had at length ceased speaking. "You perceive that I am above the prejudices of my race, and am not afraid of the interrogation point. But, my dear fellow, I can't help you. I can throw no light whatever upon this mystery, unless too great an indulgence in——"

"Stop, sir!" I exclaimed. "I protest. I never indulge too deeply, nor does my friend, De Veber. Look at us both. Not ten minutes have elapsed since that man stood beside us on this tower. Do we show any signs of over indulgence now?"

"No, no; certainly not," he replied hastily. "But tales of mysterious levitations—I think that was the word you used, Mr. De Veber—remind one of sea-serpent stories and naturally suggest—but enough of this! Seriously, gentlemen, I can assure you that such a person as you describe could scarcely have passed me unnoticed. I saw nothing of him and am glad I did not Hope I never may."

"Why so?" asked Maurice.

"Because I am wholly skeptical on these points and have seen enough to make me so."

"For instance?"

"Oh come, I don't care to enter into a discussion on Spiritualism—that's what you are driving at. Give me a light."

"He has seen nothing," I thought, as I passed him the match safe, "but he has read much and is afraid to expose his hand until he knows the cards against which he has to play."

"And I," said Maurice slowly, "am willing to enter into any investigation which will shed light upon the mighty problem of the hereafter. We are here in this world to-day, we are gone to-morrow. Where? That's what I want to know."

"And are you likely to find out?" demanded Mr. Philpot, turning upon Maurice with more earnestness than he had yet displayed. "For centuries the world has been combating with that problem, and how far have they advanced? Not one inch. Thousands of years ago, sorcerers and magicians gave us the same mysterious manifestations that your modern mediums do to-day. Anciently men respected these persons; later on they burned them; now they laugh at their often exposed humbugs. Bah! I have preached heaven and held up hell as a bugaboo, for money, and priests, by the hundreds of thousands, have done and ever will do the same; but what proof is there? Frankly, gentlemen, I, who have the right to know, say to you there is none. We know that we die, and that is all we do know, and a hundred centuries of preaching to the contrary has been unable to show us any more."

"I cannot agree with you," replied Maurice, coldly. "Thousands of witnesses have testified to the truth of spiritual manifestations, and yet you throw their testimony aside with one wave of the hand."

"And you are a Spiritualist then?"

"On the contrary, I am nothing of the sort. I defined my position just now. I am an investigator—nothing more. I do not claim that the testimony of these witnesses is true."

"And you, to talk as you do, must be a pretty thorough skeptic," I interposed. "Until now, I could have freely endorsed every word you say."

"You've hit it," answered Mr. Philpot lightly. "To one likely to betray me I would never admit it, for I may find it convenient to assume a charge again at any time; but, to you, I say freely, I believe nothing, and investigation only goes to strengthen my unbelief. What is religion but a tissue of falsities, a hollow sham, a cloak for a selfish priesthood to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the multitude—it is nothing less, nothing more. Pope, cardinal, bishop and priest, it is all one in my experience. Bah! I was 'Low-Church,' and was kicked out, because I wouldn't burn candles on my altar, swing censers and listen to the confessions of morbid women. Then I tried 'High-Church,' burned candles by the box and incense by the pound. But no! 'Twould'nt suit. They kicked because I wasn't 'Low-Church,' growled because I smoked, accused me of being a

drunkard because I liked my glass of wine as well as the best of them—but pardon me, gentlemen, I find I am drifting toward the autobiographical. The sun is growing hot here. Let us go down."

"One moment," interposed Maurice, "and I am not only ready to join you, Mr. Philpot, but extend a cordial invitation for you to join us at breakfast. This man—this Mirrikh—you have heard our story—tell me what you think?"

"That he is an unmitigated fraud," replied Philpot promptly. "A Hindoo adept, doubtless, full of mysticism and bosh, but still possessed of the knowledge of certain perfectly natural laws which, to us, are mysteries, enabling him to perform certain tricks and produce certain appearances which, in our eyes, seem supernatural—that is all."

"And his face?"

"Either painted or marked by disease."

"And you account for his disappearance—how?"

"Of course," he replied, "any theory which I may advance in that regard can be only a theory. I am no Buddhist, thank God, but during my residence in India I have seen many strange things for which I was wholly unable to account. Let us suppose, for instance, the existence of some subtile and hitherto unknown gas—unknown, at least, so far as our western scientists are concerned. Might it not be possible to project that toward the nostrils secretly, and so deaden the senses that the operator who desires to levitate himself—I have adoptec your word, you see, Mr. De Veber—will have time to pass out of sight?"

"Scarcely satisfactory," I answered promptly. "I'll swear that nothing of the kind was tried in this case."

"Don't be too sure."

"Have you ever witnessed anything of the sort in India?"

"The transportation of inanimate matter without visible aid—no."

"Then it is usless for you to theorize."

"Perhaps so. Still, I repeat, such things have unquestionably been done."

"Then why not in this case?"

"It is possible, but I must doubt it."

"No more than I do," I answered, "and yet what I saw, I saw."

"It is useless to continue this discussion," interposed Maurice. "Not only in India, but in every country on the face of the globe have such apparent impossibilities occurred. And yet, I repeat, even I do not believe."

"Then this man whom we both saw go up the stairs must actually have gone down?" I demanded testily. "I am no more a religionist than yourselves, gentlemen. Of modern Spiritulism I know next to nothing, of the claims of Buddhist adepts still less; and yet—Great God! Maurice, there he is again!"

In the middle of my protest I broke off suddenly. I recall perfectly the very words I used.

For my eyes finding no pleasant resting place on the face of our "reformed parson," had wandered to the courtyard below, and there I saw Mr. Mirrikh walking along the grass-grown pavement with bowed head and arms folded across his breast.

"Certainly he is a most singular looking person," said Philpot. "So that is the man?"

"That is the man," I replied.

"I wish I might look beneath that covering," he mused. "Surely the upper part of the face and the hands are white."

"Rather yellow," said I. "If you could see him closely, you—protecting powers! Where is he now?"

We stood there gazing at each other in breathless amazement.

But one second before, and the man had been slowly walking across the interior court of the Nagkon Wat.

Speaking for myself—and my companions testified to the same—not for one instant had my eyes been removed from him, and yet now he was no longer there.

"You see," said Maurice, cooly lighting a fresh cheroot.

There was not the slightest projection of any sort above the pavement of the court. For the man to have hidden himself from our view was quite impossible. Even Philpot was obliged to admit that.

"Come, let us go down at once and investigate this business," he exclaimed. "I have seen strange things in my time, but this—"

"Stop!" I said. "Going down will not bring us to that man. Gentlemen, look there!"

There are three towers rising above the roof of the

Nagkon Wat. I reiterate this in order that the situation may be more fully understood. We, let it be remembered, were standing on the middle one, and I now raised my hand and pointed in triumph toward the summit of the lower tower, on our right.

He was there!

Standing upon the topmost platform, leaning against the balustrade we all saw him. His eyes were directed toward the rising sun.

"Amazing!" cried Philpot.

But Maurice was to be satisfied by no simple expression of astonishment.

"Hello! Hello, there!" he shouted.

Then I saw him look toward us, but at so great a distance the expression of the visible portion of his face could not be discerned.

As if in answer to Maurice's shout he waved his hand, turned, entered the low doorway behind him and disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

JUNGLE ADVENTURES.

It seems to me that I have now rendered tolerably clear the perplexed frame of mind in which Maurice De Veber and I found ourselves at the beginning of our fourth day at Angkor.

Day succeeded day and our perplexity was in no way diminished—rather increased.

Not that the mysterious Mr. Mirrikh manifested himself again.

Quite the contrary. We saw nothing of him, and just there the mystery lay.

Immediately upon our descent from the central tower of the ruined temple, the Reverend Miles Philpot set himself the task of finding "that man."

Briefly, he did not succeed; and that with every opportunity for success; for Philpot among his other accomplishments—and they were certainly many—numbered a very

tolerable acquaintance with the Siamese language, and he at once proceeded to question the old priests who guard the Nagkon Wat.

It was a useless effort. From the priests—intelligent men of their class—we received the most positive assurances that no stranger was present at the ruins but ourselves, nor had been for months past. Of a man with a partially concealed face they had never heard.

But had no one seen Mr. Mirrikh but ourselves?

Yes; Maurice's Chinese cook, Ah Schow, had seen him crossing the courtyard while on the way to fetch water for our breakfast from a spring behind the temple. Seen him for a moment only, for then his attention was attracted by something else. When Ah Schow looked back, wondering at the concealed face, the man was gone.

And this was all.

Be very certain that we all three made haste to ascend the winding staircase of the right hand tower, having our labor for our pains.

As the days glided by, the Rev. Miles Philpot remained our guest, and it struck me that it was a very fortunate thing for His Reverence that he had fallen in with us as he did.

So far as I could learn he was almost without money, and he certainly had come into the depths of this Siamese forest wholly unprovided with such creature comforts as were absolutely necessary for existence, and unattended as well.

He made no concealment of this. On the contrary, he boasted of his luck.

"If I hadn't met you boys," he said, "likely as not I would have starved. It was a crazy undertaking, but I had grown tired of Bangkok and was determined to see these ruins. I shall go back with you to Panompin, and if nothing turns up there I'll jog on to Singapore, where I have been promised a charge at a mission station. If I fail there I think I shall go home to England."

Never have I been thrown in with a man so well informed and yet so light and trivial in all his methods of thought.

Maurice seemed to like him; I endured him—he amused me with his sarcasm and his dry sayings. So long as he kept me from thinking it was enough.

One of the few things of which his luggage boasted beyond a change of clothing was a small camera, and with this he entertained himself and us by taking negatives,

which he had no means of developing, of those beautiful bas-reliefs which adorn the walls of the Nagkon Wat.

One morning—I believe it was the tenth, for I remember we had about exhausted the subject of Mr. Mirrikh and his mysterious disappearances—just as I was emerging from the chamber opening off the broad veranda which extends the full length of the old temple in front, I encountered Philpot and Maurice hurrying up the steps.

"Glorious news, old fellow!" exclaimed my friend. "The boat is up from the lake at last and with it all our traps. Now we can pay our long projected visit to Ballambong. Wong is following with the things he brought up; and see, the fellow, bound to make a clean sweep, brought this along with the rest."

It was Mr. Mirrikh's little hand bag which Maurice extended toward me, with an odd twinkle in his eye.

"Heavens! That bag!" I exclaimed. "What a pity we did not have it, when—"

"When he last materialized," broke in Philpot. "I say no. Spirits have no use for hand bags. I believe you are still an advocate for the ghostly theory, Mr. Wylde?"

It was one of his jokes, for it was Maurice, not I, who in our repeated discussions had shown an inclination to connect those strange appearances and vanishings with the materialization phenomena of modern Spiritualism; while I, on the contrary, had stoutly maintained that I never could by any possibility be brought to admit that my Panompin acquaintance was other than a creature of flesh and blood like ourselves.

"Hold on there, Doctor!" I cried—it was Maurice who had given him the title—"remember there is a fine for the first person mentioning the name of that individual argumentatively. I believe we shall see him again, and I am glad Wong made the blunder and brought the bag."

I extended my hand to take it from Maurice, but Philpot with that impetuosity which characterized all his movements, snatched it away.

"Look out!" he exclaimed. "Dynamite! Infernal machine! Hold on, boys! It don't matter about me. The world will never miss Miles Philpot. I'm going to open this bag."

"No, no! Don't do it!" I said. "Suppose he returns and claims it?"

"Let him! What do I care? Throw all the blame on me—here goes."

Before I could prevent, he thrust the big knife he always carried, between the metal edges of the bag, and pried the two halves apart.

"Confound you! What did you do that for?" I exclaimed, now seriously vexed at the persistency he displayed.

But Maurice sided against me.

"Bother, George! Why do you make so much fuss about nothing?" he said. "The Doctor is right. By all means let us see what is inside the bag."

I maintained a sulky silence. It was quite impossible for me to quarrel with Maurice. I loved him too well for that.

"Thunder!" remarked the Doctor, tumbling over the contents of the bag, "nothing very theosophic here. On the contrary, everything seems quite material. Two shirts, a pair of muslin drawers, six collars, four pair of cuffs, a tooth brush, comb, hair brush and a bottle of Brigg's patent liver pills."

"Try the other side," suggested Maurice.

"Well, here we have one or two Calcutta papers, not more than six months old," continued the Doctor, "a packet of court plaster, a pair of shoes, six pair stockings, pocket ink stand and this book—perhaps that will throw some ray of light upon the dark mystery surrounding our levitating friend."

"Stop!" I exclaimed. "Stop! I won't have it. Let Mr. Mirrikh be what he may, I gave him my word that this bag should be forwarded to Radma Gungeet, of Benares. Doctor, I appeal to you as a gentleman——"

"What! Radma Gungeet—did you say, Radma Gungeet?" cried the Doctor. He paused with the book unopened in his hand.

"Certainly. That was the address he gave me."

"That fixes Mirrikh as a Hindoo, at all events. Do you happen to know who and what this Radma Gungeet is?"

"I neither know nor care. He shall have that bag unless Mirrikh comes after it, and I feel thoroughly ashamed of myself to think that it is now impossible for him to receive it with its contents undisturbed."

"Radma Gungeet is one of the most noted adepts in India," said the Doctor, slowly. "Wylde, this goes far to show that Mirrikh is one of those singular beings himself."

"No matter. I want that bag, Doctor, and I insist upon that book remaining unopened."

"Too late!" replied Philpot, and before I could interfere he had opened the volume and was running over its pages.

I sprang forward and would have snatched it from him, but Maurice caught my arm and restrained me.

"Come, come, George! No quarrelling!" he said. "What's done can't be undone. Everything shall be carefully returned to the bag. Doctor, what do you make of the book?"

For the Doctor had stopped turning over the leaves and was staring at a page with a deeply puzzled expression.

"Upon my word I can't make anything of it," he replied, slowly. "It is a mystery, a veritable mystery. Look here."

He held up the book, open as it was, looking more serious than I had ever seen him look before.

Now there was nothing peculiar about the book so far as outward appearance was concerned. It was simply an ordinary blank book, leather bound, with limp covers, closely written perhaps half through. It was the peculiarity of the writing which had puzzled the Doctor, and possibly had I been better informed on such matters it might have puzzled me.

"Well, what is odd about it?" I demanded, sulkily.

"Look and see," repeated Philpot. "De Veber, you surely are able to comprehend."

"I confess I don't see what you are driving at!" answered Maurice. "Of course the language is as incomprehensible to me as it is to Wylde. Hindoo, I take it, Sanscrit or possibly Bengalee."

"Neither one nor the other," replied the Doctor. "No such characters as those were ever used in India."

"What then?" I asked.

"There lies the mystery," he answered slowly. "Those characters belong to no nation on earth."

"Bosh! As though you were competent to decide that."

I saw his eyes flash, and I knew that I had come near to rousing a temper which I fancy seldom showed itself.

"You are angry Wylde," he said cooly. "It happens that I am competent to decide in this matter. I can read Sanscrit, Hindoostanee, Bengalee, Talenga, Siamese and Persian. Beside that I was for ten years linguist of the British Bible Society and have assisted in the transla-

tion of the Bible into nearly every language of the East."

I was amazed. Were the claims of this man true? In the days which followed I came to know that they were.

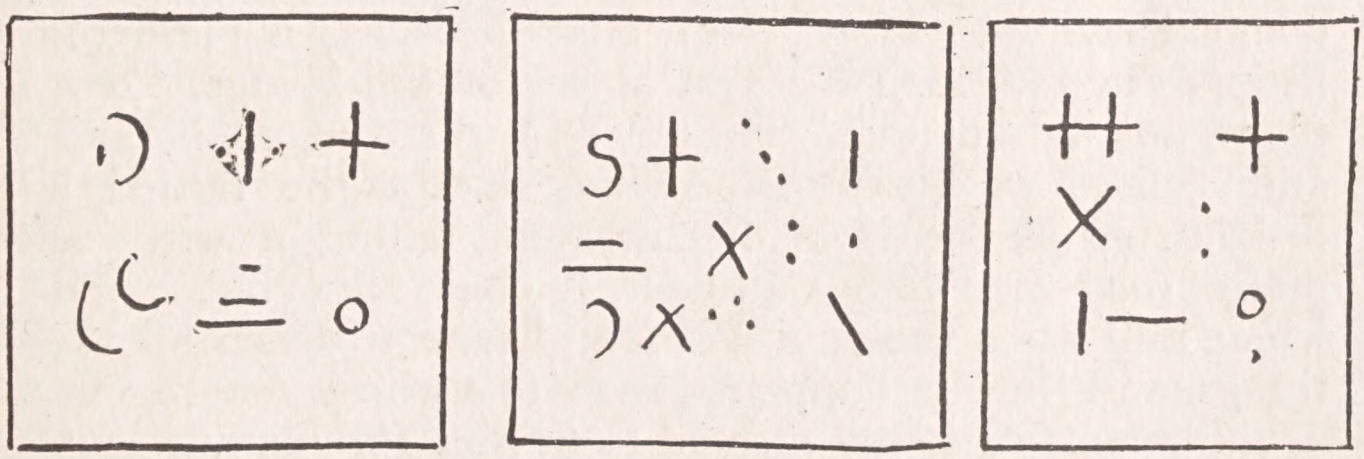
"And do you mean to say that this book is written in an unknown language?" demanded Maurice, incredulously.

"By no means," replied the Doctor. "All I assert is that the characters are unknown—the language may be English, for all I can tell."

"May it not be written in cipher?"

"Certainly; and such I am inclined to think is actually the case. But there, examine it for yourselves, gentlemen. Wylde, I owe you an apology. I am sorry I opened the bag against your wishes, but having opened it, I was determined to see what it contained."

I made no reply, for I was still angry. Taking the book from his hand almost rudely, I proceeded to make a more critical examination, half expecting, I am free to confess, to see Mr. Mirrikh suddenly appear among us and reproach me for what had been done.



But I could make nothing of it, nor could Maurice. The characters were most peculiar and seemed to be made up of simple strokes, dots and curves, arranged at different angles. They neither extended across the page, nor yet up and down in columns, as the Chinese write, but were arranged in little squares, or tablets, after the manner of those mysterious hieroglyphics found sculptured on the monuments of Palenque, Copan, Uxmal, and other ruined cities of Mexico and Central America, which, as is well known, have thus far defied the skill of the most noted antiquarians of the world.

But in a matter of this kind, description goes for nothing. I reproduce, above, three sample squares for the inspection of the reader. Let him judge of their peculiarity for himself.

Now this happened at the beginning of a day destined to become most notable among those spent at Angkor.

By noon we were at Ballambong, where lies concealed in the very heart of the forest a minature Nagkon Wat, not lacking interest to the professed antiquarian, but to us it seemed decidedly tame.

We had gone into the jungle accompanied only by one old priest whom we had taken pains to propitiate by frequent gifts of brandy and tobacco. Although only three miles distant from Angkor, the journey had been a hard one, since every step of the way took us through a dense tropical tangle, keeping me in momentary dread of dangling pythons, prowling tigers and other pleasing diversions.

Nevertheless the trip was not without enjoyment. The day was perfect, and as the rainy season was now close upon us, such days were not to be despised. Maurice was full of life and spirits, and Philpot certainly at his best. Jovial always, he seemed to surpass himself in joviality on that particular morning. Witty upon all occasions, he kept us in a constant roar of laughter by his quaint remarks and comical sayings. More than all this, it was a pleasure to listen as he unfolded his vast stores of knowledge. Not a plant, not a tree nor shrub, but he had the name, botanical and vulgar, at his tongue's end, and as he rattled on, discoursing learnedly at one moment, telling a witty and often broad anecdote the next, I could not but wonder where and when the man had found time to learn all these things, and how it happened that one whose manners and acquirements certainly seemed to fit him for many elevated positions, had become so complete a nomad—a wanderer on the face of the earth.

We remained at the ruins three hours, during which time Philpot took a series of views of the temple and the most notable of the bas-reliefs.

I remember how he sang over his work, stopping only to light his pipe—the tobacco had been begged from Maurice—and to quiz the old priest, who followed us about like a dog, watching our operations with awe.

Meanwhile I kept myself busy studying inscriptions and dreaming over the lost glories of this wonderful land. I pondered upon the problems which Angkor and its environs offer to the antiquarian. I fancied these old temples in their glory, with a mighty city surrounding them.

"This very building may have been included within the limits," I was reflecting, when all at once Philpot came bursting into the apartment where I stood before an inscribed tablet bearing a long history of the doings of some forgotten dignitary of the ancient Cambodian race.

"Look here, Wylde, we are in a precious pickle now!" he broke out.

"What is the trouble?" I inquired, turning with a start, for I had not been conscious of his approach.

"Why that wretched fraud of a priest refuses to go back with us. Says he is obliged to stay here to perform some heathen ceremony or another, and has just informed me that we can stay until morning or return to the Nagkon Wat as best we can."

"Well, I don't see anything so very terrible about that," I answered. "It is scarcely past four o'clock, and the distance is only three miles. For my part I'd as soon be rid of the fellow—he's only in the way."

"Precisely, but suppose we miss the path?"

"No danger. It is a straight trail through the forest. We couldn't miss it if we were to try."

"Which only goes to show how little you comprehend the dangers of a Siamese forest," he replied. "I tell you, my dear fellow, we are very likely to miss our way, and that means wandering in the jungle indefinitely, living on all sorts of unpleasant things, with the beautiful prospect of starving to death in the end."

"Pshaw! You exaggerate. Have you tried all your powers of persuasion?"

"Aye, and of Maurice's brandy flask and tobacco bag into the bargain. It's no go. The old fanatic has got some crotchet into his head, and the devil himself couldn't knock it out."

I found Maurice less excited than the Doctor, but still anxious, and of the opinion that we ought to start back at once.

"Mr. Philpot is right, George, he said. "There is danger. We are without a compass and the jungle is full of wild beasts. It would be no joke to get lost in these woods."

Meanwhile the priest had taken himself off and could not be found. Probably he was concealed somewhere among the ruins, but we made no attempt to look for him, simply bundling our traps together and starting off along the narrow trail in single file.

"Upon my word I'm sorry we ever ventured into this beastly hole," grumbled Philpot, after we had advanced about a mile or so. "A night spent here would bring us all down with jungle fever—heavens! look there!"

He pointed toward a huge atap palm just in advance of us, from which a thick, brown tendril, as I supposed it to be, for I had seen it before, hung dangling. But, now, as I looked again, I saw the supposed tendril suddenly elevate itself; saw a well defined head, a pair of wicked beady eyes flash fire, and a forked tongue shoot out like lightning. It was a huge serpent, which in a moment more might have been twining its folds about the Doctor's neck.

I started back in terror, but Maurice, always cool, raised his rifle and fired.

The snake drew back and disappeared among the palm leaves. Whether the shot took effect or not, I cannot say, for we did not pause to investigate.

"Now you see!" said the Doctor. "Pleasant prospect for the night if we should happen to miss our way. Once in India I spent three nights in the jungle. I tell you those nights will live in my memory until my dying day."

"But we are not going to stay here all night," answered Maurice.

Suddenly he paused. A puzzled expression passed over his face, for we had come to a division in the path."

"By Jove!" cried the Doctor. "What did I tell you?"

"We want to keep to the right," I said emphatically, for I felt certain that I remembered the place.

"Are you sure?" asked Maurice.

"As certain as I can be."

"We passed three such divisions coming down," interposed the Doctor; "what do you go by? Is there any landmark that you particularly observed?"

I was obliged to confess that there was not, and yet I felt so positive of my position that I repeated my assertion with some warmth.

"What do you say, Doctor?" asked Maurice. "Shall we venture?"

"Faith, my dear boy, we might as well try one road as the other," he replied lightly, "but with all due deference to Brother Wylde, I doubt if he knows any more about it than we do."

"Very well; I am quite willing to yield my opinion," said

I. But they would not have it so. Since I had an opinion and they had none, it was decided to take the right hand path.

As we hurried on the jungle seemed to grow denser, yet the path remained clearly defined.

"I am becoming more and more convinced that we are going wrong," said the Doctor, at length. "Look at that fan palm—I am certain we did not pass it. A beautiful specimen. I should have been sure to notice it particularly, but as it is I am ready to swear I never saw it before."

"Shall we retrace our steps then?" I asked, for I had become less confident myself.

"Suppose we push on a little further," said Maurice. "It seems to me I can distinguish an opening on ahead."

"Which would go to prove that we are astray," added the Doctor, "for we passed no clearing of any sort coming down."

"True; but it may be a native village where we could find a guide," said I.

"Hark!" cried Maurice. "What was that? An elephant, surely!"

For an instant a shrill trumpeting resounded through the forest and then all grew still.

"Come on!" shouted Maurice, unslinging his rifle. "It has always been my ambition to bag an elephant and the chance has come at last!"

We pushed on, advancing with as much caution as possible. Again the trumpeting was heard, and still again.

"An elephant it is beyond all question," said Philpot, "but I'm afraid you can't kill it, after all, Maurice."

"Why not, I'd like to know! Do you mean to intimate that my shooting is so poor that I couldn't hit a beast as big as the side of a house?"

"Not at all," laughed the Doctor. "I only mean to intimate that your elephant is a tame one. Look there!"

We had rounded a turn in the path now and saw directly ahead a large elephant, standing beneath a cocoa palm which formed one of a grove of similar trees surrounding a little collection of grass-thatched huts.

"A village!" I exclaimed. "This settles it. We are on the wrong road."

"And it puts a finish to De Veber's elephant hunt!" laughed the Doctor. "Why that beast is half blind and

looks as though he might be crowding a hundred. But where are all the people?"

There was no one to be seen; at least no one but the aged elephant, who stood there leisurely waving his trunk back and forth and peering at us out of his little eyes in a fashion which disproved the Doctor's theory of blindness. There were at least a dozen of the huts; the doors all stood wide open, with fowls running in and out, and stretched directly across the threshold of one lay an old sow with her litter of pigs who blinked at us lazily, and then, apparently assured that we were harmless, closed her eyes with a satisfied grunt.

"Good!" cried the Doctor. "This is precisely what we want. We shall be sure to find a guide here who will take us over to Angkor for a few ticals. Hello there! Hello!"

There was no direct answer, but at the same instant the echoes of the forest were awakened by a piercing scream, which seemed to proceed from behind the huts among the palms.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Doctor. "A female in distress? It is, as I live! Shades of my ancestors! This won't do! No true born Briton can turn away from that appeal."

Now the cry came again. It was surely that of a woman in agony, just as the Doctor said.

We hurried behind the huts, coming upon a group of half-naked natives, who were clustering about two giant cocoa palms in the middle of a little clearing.

"Thunder and Mars! What barbarity!" burst from the Doctor, as we looked ahead.

Between the palms was a young girl, her only dress the panoung, or Siamese breech cloth, worn by men, which dropped from the waist below the knees. She was bound by the wrists and ankles to the two trees writhing under the blows of a strip of rawhide wielded by a wicked looking fellow behind her. Each time it descended a shout of satisfaction went up from those who crowded around.

"I'll soon put a stop to this!" shouted the Doctor. "Nothing of the sort can be allowed with your uncle about."

Never had I respected the man as I did at that moment when he sprang away from us and dashed fearlessly among the group.

Not that Maurice and I were backward. Cocking our rifles we followed the Doctor, shouting as we went.

But there was nothing to fear. The instant the crowd saw us they fell back, the half-naked cowards scampering off in every direction, not, however, before the Doctor had caught the flogger and dashed him to the earth. The fellow made no resistence, but went crawling off on his hands and knees like some animal, disappearing among the palms.

Meanwhile Maurice had whipped out his knife and cut the cords which bound the girl, who seemed to have fallen into a state of unconsciousness. I would have helped him had I not been prevented by my legs being suddenly seized by an aged, white haired man, who crouched upon the ground weeping and muttering. With some little difficulty I managed to free myself, and extending a hand raised him to his feet."

"What does all this mean?" I exclaimed. "Look, Doctor! These people are white!"

I had used the word when perhaps I should not, for certainly the girl was not white, her skin having rather the yellowish tinge of the Spaniard or Portuguese. And yet she was beautiful. As my eyes turned toward her I saw it and wondered that I had not seen it at the first. Never was there a form of more correct proportions! Never such hair as those long black tresses, hanging loosely in a thick mass over her shoulders; as for the face every feature was perfection itself, a study for a sculptor; involuntarily my mind pictured the Venus di Milo, and then——

Why then, as my eyes rested upon her while she stood supported by Maurice, a most singular thing happened to me.

Suddenly all my surroundings seemed blotted out and I could see only the girl, and the sight seemed to move my heart as it had never been moved before.

What did it mean?

Was it a case of love?

Love! Had I ever known it? Never, certainly, as I knew it then!

As I gazed upon that still, tear-stained face, a strange tingling shot through me down to my very toes, and I was seized with an instant of jealousy of Maurice; a longing to tear her from him and fly with her to the forest, to bury myself in its most remote recesses where I could live for her alone!

Was I mad? Was this the man who had cursed the fair sex with that bitterness which can be had only by sad ex-

perience? What was the meaning of this sudden freak?

Certainly I was not master of my own actions when I leaped forward and seizing her bleeding form pressed it to my heart!

Yes, in that moment I must have been mad; though in the days that followed, when memory recalled my ridiculous action, I came to believe that the man Mirrikh was in a measure responsible; that the mere touch of his hand had brought to life some force within me the nature of which I do not pretend to explain. But this is anticipating the outcome of our strange meeting at Panompin. I must return.

The instant I found my arms about the girl I was myself again, and amazed at what I had done.

Love! Why, to me love meant misery—misery pure and unadulterated. I had drank my fill of the fatal cup before this and the draught had sickened me. Almost roughly I pushed the girl back upon Maurice who was regarding me in mild surprise.

"Take her! Take her!" I exclaimed. "She is too heavy for me—I shall let her fall."

"Take the devil!" he cried half angrily. "Have you lost your senses? What do you mean? You were so anxious to get her, now keep her. I don't know anything about women and don't want to." Angrily he drew away.

But Maurice was not quick enough. Before he could prevent it I had again transferred the burden to his arms, a strange shudder passing over me as I let her go.

"I beg your pardon, old fellow, I—I'm a little upset by all this," I stammered. "If you can't hold her why lay her down on the grass."

"Now that's more like it," muttered Maurice. "Here, let the old fellow take care of her—he's the proper person. Hello there, Doctor! Tell him to look after the girl, will you? I don't want the responsibility of this."

"It's all right. She's only fainted. I saw that at the start," replied the Doctor, who had been talking to the old man in Siamese. She's his daughter, he says. He'll look after her, boys."

The man was at her side in an instant, for be very sure Maurice lost no time in laying the girl down. Hastily bending over her he pressed his hand upon her heart, and then turning suddenly, flung himself at Maurice's feet, kissing them again and again, at the same time clutching his ankles

so that the boy could not move. Meanwhile the Doctor, seized by some sudden notion had started off on the run toward the huts.

Maurice's face was a study as he tried to free himself from the old man's grasp.

"Great heavens! Has everybody run mad but me!" he shouted. "Take him off, George! Take him off, will you? I don't want to kick the old fellow, but I can't stand this."

I interfered and in a moment had rescued him.

"Ye gods! but that's a relief!" cried Maurice, as the old man returned to the girl again. "What a row we've all got into, to be sure! Is she dead, George? Where's the Doctor? He knows everything and ought to be here now. One would think you'd both been bitten by the tarantula. Confound him! Why did he run away?"

"No, no! She's not dead. It's only a faint," I exclaimed. "She'll come out of it all right."

Something of a physician myself, I bent down hastily and feeling heart and pulse saw that there was really nothing to be feared. I was right, too. A few drops of brandy from Maurice's flask speedily brought a return of consciousness. Perceiving a spring among the palms near by, I fetched some water in an earthen pot, which I happily discovered, and with this the old man tenderly bathed her head and the bleeding welts upon her back, talking incessantly in an unknown tongue. I could not fail to notice that his conversation was directed toward Maurice, whom he evidently regarded as responsible for the whole affair.

Meanwhile the Doctor continued absent and Maurice kept right on growling; he had not got over my moment of folly it seemed. Nor had I recovered from it either, and I was furious with myself about it. As I could not look toward the girl without starting into life the same absurd sensations, I bravely looked the other way.

"Confound it all! it will be dark in a few moments!" exclaimed Maurice. "Why don't he come? We want to be getting out of this."

It was quite evident that he was right. Not only was night approaching, but the sky, hitherto perpetually serene, had now begun to cloud over, and the faint sighing of the wind through the palms seemed to indicate an approaching storm.

Meanwhile the girl had arisen and stood leaning against

her father, who kept "firing words at us," as Maurice expressed it, which of course were wholly unintelligible.

"Yes, yes, it's all right!" said Maurice, nodding good naturedly. "Much obliged—never forget us, and all that sort of thing. We understand."

Suddenly the old fellow made a dart off among the palms and vanished.

"Great heavens! is he going to leave the girl on our hands?" cried Maurice, in evident alarm. But before we had time to discuss it there he was back again, carrying in his arms a rawhide pack which he flung upon the ground at Maurice's feet. Still chattering, he loosened the straps and opening the pack drew out a loose, cotton garment, blue in color and fashioned something like the native pajama, which he proceeded to throw over the shoulders of the girl who, with downcast eyes, stood quietly by his side.

Now he bent over the pack again and took out a large camel's hair shawl of exquisite pattern and laid it over Maurice's arm with a profound salaam.

"That's for you!" said I. "See what you get for your share in this business."

"But I don't want it! I'm no more entitled to it than you are, George! What in the world am I to do with the thing?"

Indeed, he would have returned the gift, but the old man either could not or would not comprehend.

Salaaming again, this time including both of us, he hastily closed the pack, slung it upon his shoulders, and taking the girl by the hand tottered off among the palms.

Was she actually going? Again those ridiculous sensations seemed to seize me. I longed to rush forward to drag her back, but I restrained myself, disgusted at my own thoughts which not for worlds would I have had Maurice know. "We ought to stop them—we ought to know more of this matter;" was all I could trust myself to say.

"Why?" asked Maurice, indifferently. "We've done all that could be expected of us, George. Let them go their way. Hello! Here's the Doctor back at last, and its about time, I must say."

I turned to look. Philpot was approaching from the direction of the huts. When my gaze reverted toward the forest again it was only to get a last glimpse of that singular pair disappearing among the palms, hand in hand.

"Hello! Where are those people?" exclaimed the Doctor, as he came hurrying up a few minutes later on.

"Gone," replied Maurice, "and it's time we were going too. What in thunder made you run off the way you did?"

"Why, the old man said they had robbed him of all his money," cried the Doctor. "Told me it was in a little canvas bag; the reason they were beating the girl was to make her confess where he had hidden the rest."

"And you went to get it back?"

"Yes. I pitied them. Unfortunate wretches! Said he was a peddler from a country to the north of this. Why, he begged me, with tears in his eyes, to get back the money, saying that he was ruined, and all that sort of thing, and now he has gone and lit out without even waiting to see what success I met with. I say it begins to look as though I'd been played for a fool."

"Did you get the money?" asked Maurice.

"Got nothing," was the angry response. "Couldn't come up with one of those fellows. The whole village is deserted now, except for the elephant and the pigs. Confound the luck! I wanted to see the head-man, as they call him, and make him tell us our way. There never were such precious cowards as these Siamese. I say, De Veber, where did you get the shawl?"

Explanations were evidently in order now all around, and the next five minutes were spent in making them.

I expected to learn something about the old man and his daughter, but was disappointed, for the Doctor had already told all he knew.

"What were those people, anyhow?" asked Maurice. "They looked too white to be Siamese, or Cambodians either, for that matter."

"Certainly they were neither, though the old chap spoke Siamese well enough," replied the Doctor. "I wish to goodness you fellows hadn't let them off so easily. I'm puzzled to know why the man should have humbugged me about the money the way he did."

"You don't think he had lost any money then?" I asked.

"Why of course not. Do you suppose he would have trotted off if he had?"

"Probably not. Yet I can't see his motive."

"I rather suspect he thought we were French officers and might detain them both until the outrage could be invest-

igated, though why he should have picked me out for the leader and tried that clever dodge to get me out of the way, I can't understand."

"Come, come!" cried Maurice, "time enough has been wasted over this adventure. Night is right on top of us, and a storm along with it, if I am any judge of Siamese meteorology. Let us get back to the place we turned off as soon as possible, and try the left hand trail."

There was sound common sense in this, yet, in spite of myself, my thoughts would wander toward the forest. "What do you think of the shawl, Doctor?" I asked abruptly, in the effort to shake them off.

"Why, it's a genuine camel's hair. Did the old man give it to you, De Veber?"

"Yes; I had to accept it."

"Had to accept it! I only wish it had been me then. Why man, that shawl would bring a good hundred pounds in London.."

"No!"

"Fact, I assure you. I didn't notice what it was till Wylde called my attention to it. A famous present for the future Mrs. De Veber. You will do well to hold on to it."

He was right, too. I may as well mention that the shawl was finally sold for £70. Perhaps it was the last part of Philpot's remark that made Maurice so anxious to get rid of it. I remember well how he laughed when he answered:

"I shall hold it till it rots then before I put it to the use you suggest. Mrs. De Veber is a long way *in futuro*. I'm afraid she will never find any use for her shawl."

"What? Opposed to the divine institution," cried the Doctor. "Give me your hand young man? You are a fellow after my own heart. I wouldn't marry the best woman in the world, no, not if she were hung with diamonds. But a young chap like you can scarcely be expected to feel that way."

"I think I am one of the select few who are willing to profit by the experience of others," laughed Maurice.

"Wise man! And have the matrimonial experiences of your friends then been so disastrous?"

"Ask Wylde," Maurice was beginning, when I checked him with a frown. The Doctor saw it, and, with that perfect politeness of which he was certainly master when he chose to exert himself, immediately changed the subject.

"Come! Let us get on," he exclaimed. "There's mischief in yonder clouds. We have no time to waste."

We now hurried through the village, pausing for a moment to see if we could catch a glimpse of some of the cowardly inhabitants, and gain a word of information about the path back to Angkor.

"No go," said the Doctor. "We shan't find 'em. Anyhow, this is nothing but a wood-cutters' camp, probably belonging to some of the people in Siamrap."

None of the villagers were to be seen, and, still discussing our adventure, we now retraced our steps through the jungle. Darkness was rapidly approaching, and there was no time to be lost.

But our discussion left us where we started—nowhere.

Maurice and I had depended upon the Doctor to enlighten us. The dependence proved futile. The Doctor had no suggestion to offer.

"More of your mysterious people, Wylde," he said in his usual half-sneering way. "We shall have to hold you responsible for the whole business. Gad, boys, but she was a little beauty! If I had dreamed that our acquaintance would be so brief, I should certainly have stayed by her. Now De Veber gets all the glory, and——"

"And the shawl!" broke in Maurice. "Take it if you want it. I acknowledge you as the rescuer of the fair one. Why, even George was more active than I, and yet I have reaped the reward."

"Nonsense! What do I want of your shawl, but I will be tolerably obliged to you for a cheroot. I understand the whole business. It was your good looks that did it, De Veber. Alongside of a Yankee Apollo, what chance could two old birds like Wylde and myself hope to stand?"

Coming from one of his cloth, there was something intolerably repulsive to me in these flippant remarks. Yet why should that have influenced me? I had abjured the man's creed, I despised his profession, I had laughed when he made light of it, and yet now I seemed to demand of him a greater delicacy of thought, a purity of sentiment than possessed by the average man, although I had put him down for an average man and nothing more.

It grew darker, and darker, and yet the sun must have still been there behind the clouds, for twilight is a thing unknown in Siam. Now the whole heavens were obscured, and

the hot south wind swept our faces, passing among the tree-tops with a sighing which foretold the approaching storm.

"It is certainly going to rain," said Maurice anxiously, "and it will be dark in next to no time. I wish we were at the place where we turned off."

"It is dark now," I answered, as even the trifle of light remaining grew suddenly less, and the deepening shadows told me that the sun was down at last.

Philpot peered about anxiously.

"Plague take the fork in the path—where is it?" he exclaimed. "Do you know what I begin to fear?"

"That we have been going wrong again?" I asked.

"That's about the size of it."

"It would not surprise me. Who said this was the same trail? I declare I saw the path and just followed it—that is about all."

"What? Do you mean to tell me that! By Jove, man! I've been following you!"

"And I," added Maurice "have been tamely following both of you."

"Blind, leading the blind," cried the Doctor. "Look here, if we don't strike the junction soon, we're in for a night of it, and had better return to the wood-cutters' camp before it's too dark to find the way."

"And have our throats cut before morning?" retorted Maurice. "No, thank you. I don't pretend to the knowledge of the Siamese character that you claim, but catch me running my neck into any such noose as that."

That the situation was becoming serious there was no denying. We plunged on, the ground growing low and marshy as we advanced. A bad indication. We had passed through nothing of the sort on our way to the wood-cutters' camp.

Now the wind began to moan more ominously, and the darkness increased to that extent that we could no longer see our way.

"Delightful, ain't it?" sneered Philpot. "Heavens! I'm in water up to my knees."

He was only a few yards ahead of us, but we could no longer see him.

"Give me a hand boys, or I'm stuck!" he called. "I'm slowly sinking, Lord knows where!"

We pulled him out with considerable difficulty, all retreating a few steps to more solid ground.

"Are you all right now?" questioned Maurice.

"All right for a fever!" was the reply. "Your flask, like a good fellow, De Veber. Nothing like a little brandy as a preventive."

His "little" would have set my brain reeling, but it appeared to have but slight effect. I thought then that I could comprehend reasons for his want of success in the pulpit which the Rev. Miles Philpot had failed to name.

"Don't drink it dry, Doctor, said Maurice. "George and I may need a dose before we get out of this scrape."

"Yours truly! I leave you the flask," he replied, with that good humor which nothing seemed to ruffle. "Now boys, we're in a hole. How are we to get out of it! Decision must be had at once Hark! Was that thunder? The plot thickens, the darkness deepens! My inventive Yankee friends, what's to be did?"

"In my opinion, the sooner we get back to the wood-cutters' huts the better," I said decidedly.

At that instant the low, ominous growling heard a moment before was repeated. It seemed to me that I could hear also rustling sounds among the tangled thicket which had now taken the place of the atap palms and other trees of respectable growth on either side of our path.

I trembled. Thoughts of the dangers of the jungle would suggest themselves. I instinctively unslung my rifle and held it ready in my hand.

"More thunder?" said Maurice. "Come, come, we must decide quick. Plague take these mosquitoes! They are as thick as bees around a hive."

"Hark!" exclaimed Philpot, suddenly. "I'm not so sure it is thunder."

Nor was I. Presently it came again—a low, sullen growl, beginning in the deepest bass—rising slightly, then sinking into the bass again.

I was glad of the darkness then, for I knew my face must have been livid.

"A tiger," I suppose, I said as coolly as possible.

"As sure as we are lost in the jungle," whispered the Doctor. "Even those wood-cutters are preferable. Come! There is no time to be lost."

Again he started ahead, for the path was so narrow that single file was a necessity.

"I don't believe it's a tiger," said Maurice incredulously.

"Don't deceive yourself, De Veber," said the Doctor, "it is nothing else. "Not," he added, "that there is any great danger of the beast attacking us. But——"

The sentence remained uncompleted; or rather it was completed in a way which, to my dying day, I am not likely to forget.

A quick rush, a violent stirring of the thicket, followed by a yell which set us all trembling, and a huge, dark form leaped out upon the path before us, pausing not three yards from the spot where Philpot stood.

"Great God!" I heard Maurice exclaim, and I knew, rather than saw, that he grasped his rifle.

But I was as one paralyzed, I could see the flash of those awful eyes, could see the beast crouch for a spring, could hear its tail lash the ground and yet I never made a move.

Though wholly unarmed, poor Philpot stood his ground like a Trojan. A second of awful suspense followed.

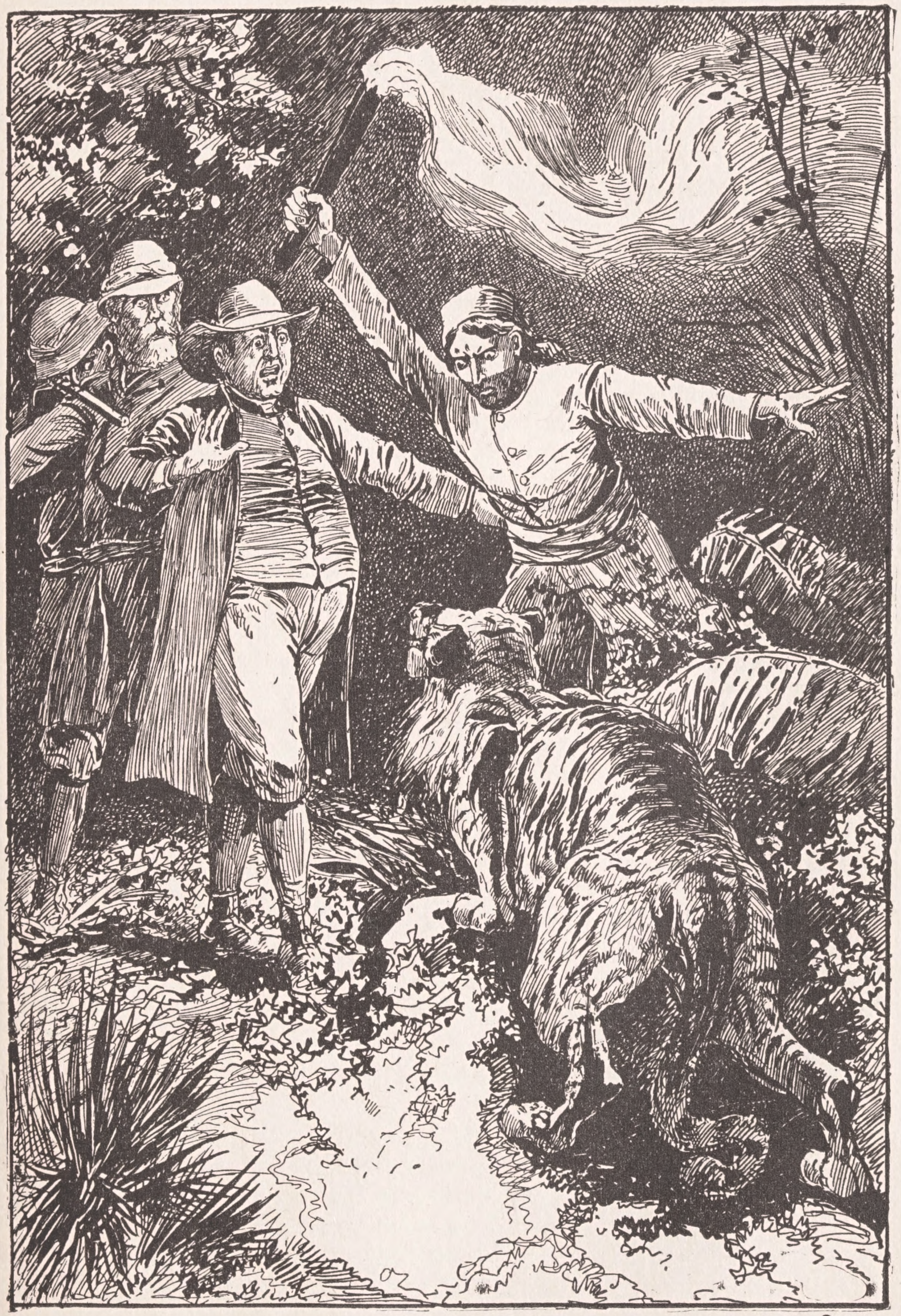
I could hear the click of Maurice's rifle. I wondered why he did not fire, when suddenly a light broke upon the scene, and to my utter amazement I saw a man leap from the thicket directly in front of the Doctor, and dash a flaming torch into the tiger's face.

It was the work of an instant. The next and all danger had passed.

Bushes, the path, my companions, everything seemed swimming about me. I saw the great cat retreating into the jungle. I heard the Doctor shout, but until the man who had burst so unceremoniously into our midst, stooped and recovered the torch, I did not realize the full significance of the scene.

Then as the light struck upon his face I knew him. Seen in that weird glare the sight was even more marvellous now. It was a face black below, yellowish white above.

It was the mysterious Mr. Mirrikh to whom we were indebted. Calm and dignified he stood there as though nothing unusual had occurred.



CHAPTER VI.

STORM BOUND IN THE OLD STONE TOWER.

"GOOD evening, gentlemen. You tarry late in the forest. Let me advise you to seek shelter as soon as possible, for unless all signs fail a storm is at hand."

It was Mr. Mirrikh who thus addressed our little party, as we all stood there staring at him like a parcel of geese, without even a word of thanks for what he had done.

The voice recalled me to myself and I hurried forward to greet him, offering my hand which he grasped cordially.

"My dear sir, how can we thank you?" I said. "Let me introduce you—the Rev. Miles Philpot, Mr. Mirrikh. Maurice, surely you have not forgotten Mr. Mirrikh so soon!"

It was a brave effort on my part, but alas! It came to nothing. They could not help staring at that face—no one could help it—I, myself, could not.

Maurice muttered something and extended his hand also, but Mr. Mirrikh seemed not to see it, while the Doctor just blurted out:

"Gad, where did you spring from? I'm awfully obliged to you for what you did, don't you know, but that face of yours——"

"Yes, we are late!" I burst out in a voice which was intended to smother the Doctor's impudent allusion, and did. "We were over at Ballambong and have been delayed, lost our way."

He smiled at me kindly and then, without answering or even looking toward Philpot until it was done, took out the black cloth and quietly proceeded to ajust it about his face.

"Now sir, you may look at me without disgust," he said, coolly, addressing himself to the Doctor. "Possibly you are not aware of the danger you have escaped?"

It was well timed and recalled Philpot to himself.

"Indeed I am, and owe you a big debt of gratitude," he hastened to say. "Pardon my curiosity, I——"

"Did you say you had missed your way, Mr. Wylde?" in-

terrupted Mr. Mirrikh, turning his back squarely upon him.

"I fear so."

"You wish to return to Angkor of course?"

"Of course."

"Take my advice and make no such attempt," he said hastily. "A storm of unusual violence is certainly approaching, and the best thing you can do is to get under cover as soon as you possibly can."

"But where can we find shelter? In the wood-cutters' village back there we shall hardly be safe."

"I do not refer to the wood-cutters' village," he interrupted. "Keep directly on as you are going. About a quarter of a mile further and you will come to a hill upon which stands an old stone tower, once an observatory they say. It is a ruinous old affair, but it will afford you shelter. You had best be quick or you will be half drowned before you can make it. Good night."

He turned to leave us, but I could not have him go so. The recollection of the bag preyed upon me. How guilty I felt. Did he know? Had he in addition to his other wonderful acquirements the power of reading men's thoughts?

"Stay!" I exclaimed, "I feel that we have not half expressed our gratitude. If you had not happened along as you did—"

"But I did, and there's been enough said already," he replied. "I have been at Ballambong myself, and was on my way through the jungle to another ruin near here. Just as I heard your voices I happened to spy the man-eater. I have been tiger hunting many times in India, and have seen that trick played before. It was a fortunate thing for all of you that I happened to have this torch."

"But will you not remain with us?" I persisted. "You stand in the same need of shelter that we do, surely,"

He shook his head, and smiled peculiarly.

"No, I do not fear the storm, I love it. What is so grand as to witness a conflict of the elements in a tropical forest? Nothing that I know of. It brings man to such a thorough realization of his own insignificance; besides I have a place of shelter in view, and shall surely reach it. Perhaps I may see you again before the storm is over. Until then, adieu!"

He bowed low, crossing his arms after the Eastern fashion, and before I could say another word, glided into the

thicket and disappeared, leaving us stupidly staring at the place where he had stood.

Philpot was the first to break the silence.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed, "if that fellow ain't a puzzle there never was one in the world."

"He's a gentleman, at all events," I replied coolly, "which, considering the way you acted, is more than I can say for you."

"Come, come, George, none of that!" cried Maurice hastily.

"Thank you," replied the Doctor. "Your remark is plainness itself, Wylde, and I am free to admit it is not undeserved."

"The same may be said of me," added Maurice. "I can never get used to that man's face."

"I'd give something if I could have touched it," added the Doctor. "It's painted, just as sure as you live."

"Nonsense! It's nothing of the sort," I answered, testily. "Disease may have produced it, but fraud, never."

"Don't be too sure, Wylde," said the Doctor.

"But I am sure. Remember I have seen it in the daylight."

"You are wrong, Doctor," added Maurice. "You are certainly wrong, and George is just as certainly right. Did you in your travels ever see anything like it before?"

"Never!"

"Or hear of any disease which could produce it?"

"I am certain there is none. In my younger days I devoted a year or two to the study of medicine—that was before I thought of the pulpit. I can assure you both that disease never made that face what it is."

"In other words, it is as unaccountable to you as to Wylde and myself; as unaccountable as the man's sudden appearance among us. Of course, he was not at Ballambong, or we should have seen him, and, even if he was, why should he go beating his way through the jungle instead of choosing the path?"

"Conundrums, every one of them, and I am not Yankee enough to be good at guessing," replied the Doctor.

But I had not regained my temper yet, for the recollection of the bag still troubled me.

"Explain the mystery or not, as you can," I said, "the fact remains, Philpot, that the man saved your life, and you were barely civil to him in return."

"Confound it, Wylde, why do you keep harping on that?" he answered almost hotly. "Do you make no allowance for a fellow's astonishment? I'll bet you a shilling when you first saw that face you were as much taken aback as I. You've said enough—let it rest."

"Yes, and while you two are squabbling, what is to hinder the tiger from returning?" put in Maurice. "I move we get out of this."

"It is time," I answered, dryly. "Look! The storm is almost upon us. Which way shall we go?"

"To the old stone tower," said Maurice promptly. "We shall do well to follow his advice."

"We'll do it!" exclaimed the Doctor. "We'll take his advice, and, by the eternal gods, if he does favor us with another call, I'll have his secret out of him, or know the reason why."

We now hurried on, crossing the swampy stretch in the path before us as best we could. Fortunately, it was of no great extent, and we soon found ourselves upon rising ground.

Clearly there was no time to be lost, for the sky had now assumed an inky blackness, and there was barely light enough to enable us to see our way.

"If we don't find his tower we are going to be in a sweet fix;" growled Philpot, after a little. "Hark! Did you hear that? Boys, I tell you there's no time to lose."

It was thunder this time. A growl, a low rumbling followed by a faint breath of wind which struck our faces with refreshing coolness in that moist, stifling heat.

Suddenly there was a rush among the bushes ahead of us, and some animal dashed across our path, disappearing in the thicket beyond, while the shrill screams of paroquets and birds whose notes were unknown, told us that we were not the only creatures in the jungle in dread of the approaching storm.

"Run!" cried Maurice. "Every moment is precious."

I felt my heart sink as we dashed ahead.

What if we had missed the tower? What if we were to be forced to brave the fury of this storm in the forest? Yet, after all, why should I care—I, who felt no interest in life?

And, as we ran, I could not but think of Mr. Mirrikh. Were there actually other ruins hidden in the jungle? Surely

he would not venture among the wood-cutters, with every probability of receiving even a ruder reception than he had experienced at the hands of the Panompin mob.

I was deeply puzzled. More so, far more so, than I had shown to my companions. I half expected, I own, to see him suddenly spring out upon us again. I would not have been surprised if I had spied him flying through the air above our heads like the witches of old. But I kept my thoughts to myself, and we hurried on.

Soon the wind had increased to a gale, and the giant trees of a belt of woodland which we had now entered bent beneath it. The thunder, too, was growing deafening, with claps alternately loud and stifled, short and prolonged, sharp and crackling, while blinding flashes of light illuminated our surroundings with terrible distinctness, only to make the darkness more profound when the change came.

But, as yet, no rain—that was still in reserve. Come it must, we knew, and we ran with all speed, peering about for the hill which Mr. Mirrikh had described.

"It's no use, George! Either there is no tower, or we must have passed it!" cried Maurice.

The words were no more than spoken, when a frightful crash resounded through the forest, and a flash of unusual intensity showed us a gigantic tree whose trunk our united arms could not have encircled, topple and fall directly before us, bringing down with it a mass of orchids and other parasitic plants, while a colony of monkeys which had taken refuge among its branches, scampered away, screaming and chattering to seek other shelter. It is needless to say we were brought to a halt.

"Merciful God! but this is terrible!" cried the Doctor. "We are safe nowhere. Ha! here comes the rain at last!"

He was right. First great drops against our faces, then a torrent, then a flood. It was the first storm of the season and if there were any worse before the dry months came again, I thank God I was not there to see.

Now came a lightning flash hardly equal to its predecessor, but of vastly more interest to us.

"Look! look! shouted Maurice. "The tower!"

We saw it before he spoke, otherwise we might never have seen it at all, for in a second all was darkness and the thunder rolling and crashing again.

"Forward!" cried the Doctor. "I saw the hill and a flight of stone steps leading up."

We leaped over the fallen tree and following the Doctor soon found ourselves at the beginning of steps leading up a hill which must surely have been artificial. It was about one hundred feet in height and cut in terraces paved with stone. Up upon these terraces four staircases led—I describe the place as I saw it afterward—solid stone affairs having hand-rails, ornamented with lions, beautifully carved, and at the top stood a large circular tower of considerable circumference, completely overgrown with shrubs and vines. On the level space about it dozens of great trees had forced their roots down between the blocks of the pavement and were now swaying wildly before the blast.

"By gracious! Mirrikh was right George!" cried Maurice, as we gained the platform at the top of the steps. "Here is the tower, sure enough!"

"But the door—where is the door!" shouted the Doctor, his words scarcely distinguishable above the howl of the storm.

We ran entirely around the building before we found it, and then it was just about where we had started from, half hidden by a mass of vines which hung trailing down from the stones above.

It was I who made the discovery; pushing the vines aside we made our way into a circular enclosure, from one side of which a flight of stairs led up into the tower; the only peculiar feature it possessed, except a huge stone image of Buddha which occupied a sitting position in a niche to the right of the staircase. A veritable colossus, three times life size, but in a sad state of delapidation, being minus a leg, an arm and the better part of the nose. In front of the pedestal was a circular depression in the stone floor half filled with bits of charcoal, and behind the image Maurice found quite a pile of dry brush wood which showed that this was not the first time the old stone tower had served as a shelter. Meanwhile the storm raged more fiercely than ever and the continual crashing of thunder was something awful to hear.

Involuntarily I thought of Mr. Mirrikh and wondered where in that wilderness beneath us he was just then. There was no other building upon the platform—that I had already made sure of—so if he was actually near us, and I half suspected it, his hiding place must be in the tower itself.

"Thank God we are here!" exclaimed Philpot—somehow his pious ejaculations always sounded to my ears like profanity—"or rather thank your friend with the black and white face. I only hope he has got so good a shelter. I say, De Veber, lend us your shawl, will you? The rain is beating in through the doorway in a perfect torrent. It will break it a little, and cut off the draught. Ye gods! but ain't it cold!"

It was exceedingly cold and we, in our wet garments, were shivering in a way horribly suggestive of fever.

Maurice brought out his brandy flask which helped us in imagination, if not in fact, and while Philpot busied himself in hanging the shawl, he and I raked out the charcoal from the hole before the image, brought wood from the corner, and as I had my matches in a waterproof case, we soon experienced the comfortable sensations of a crackling blaze; which not only served to dry our clothes and warm us up, but made things cheerful with its light.

Not that all these things were done in a moment. By no means. When we entered the tower we were in total darkness and it was only by lighting match after match that we were able to make out anything at all. Now the fire was blazing merrily and I lighted my pipe, and Maurice his cheroot—the Doctor sponging on my friend for his smoke as usual—and we all seated ourselves on the stone floor beside it, well satisfied with our snug retreat.

"We're in for a night of it," said Philpot, "and upon my soul we might have a worse place. Look at his nibs scowling down at us there! To think of men being fools enough to worship that block of stone."

He was looking up at the big image which returned his gaze with a stony stare, as the flashes from the fire played grotesquely upon its battered face.

"He is God to his worshippers, at all events," said Maurice, dreamily.

"And as good a one as the invisible Jehovah of the Jews and Christians," retorted Philpot. "There, I have said it—don't one of you dare to give me away boys."

And then, as though in rebuke of his blasphemy, came a crash of thunder which was truly terrible. It seemed to shake the old tower to its very foundation stones.

"Enough!" I cried. "Enough! Let us have no more of it. Though I may be to a certain extent in harmony

with your views, let us at least respect the prejudices of our fellows. Nor have I gone so far yet as to deny the existence of a ruling power. There must be some guiding hand which controls the vast machine we call the universe."

"Good, George!" exclaimed Maurice. "Good! It is the first time I ever heard you admit even that much."

And in truth it was a night which would have made most men chary of denying the existence of their God.

CHAPTER VII.

A DRY DISCOURSE ON MARRIAGE AND OTHER THINGS.

MARRIAGE," said the Rev. Miles Philpot, "it's a snare and a delusion. The world were better off without it. Better with such easy matrimonial relations as obtain among these people and other Eastern nations. That is my firm conviction, based upon an experience which, believe me, has been by no means small."

We were still seated around the fire in the old stone tower and as the storm without was raging with unabated fury, it seemed altogether probable that we should be forced to continue there for the remainder of the night.

Really I cannot say how our conversation came to drift into this channel. I have no doubt, however, that Philpot himself started it. Maurice had been defending the marriage relation when it reached this point, while for my own part, finding the subject entirely distasteful, I had thus far kept quietly to my pipe and made no remark.

"I don't agree with you all," replied Maurice. "It is a well known fact that the nations most advanced in civilization are those among whom the marriage relation is held to be sacred. Am I not right, George?"

"Of course you are," I replied. "A happy conjugal union is——"

"Slavery," interrupted Philpot, "mere slavery. A wife tied down by pinafores and household cares is in much the same situation as an enterprising oyster, who can't get off its bed no matter how hard it tries. As for the husband, ask any

poor devil who has been there if slavery is not preferable. Besides that, marriage breeds deceit in any man who *is* a man. A bachelor may and does do as he pleases and don't give a rap who knows it; but a married man must perpetually dissemble if he would keep the peace. It is a known fact that our greatest minds have been those untrammeled by domestic cares."

"Have you ever been married yourself?" I asked, abruptly.

"No, thank God, nor never intend to be; though I have spliced at least a great gross of idiots in my time."

"Which gives you no claim to an intimate knowledge of the conjugal relation, however."

"Bah! The French manage things after my notion. There you have an enlightened race upon whom the sanctity of the marriage relation rests with feathery lightness. Don't trust the woman unless you want to have your heart turned inside out, and your faith in human nature destroyed. Hasn't such been your experience, Mr. Wylde?"

"Unfortunately it has, and probably you know it," I answered, "but, for all that, I am not shallow enough to fancy that because I have been unfortunate, there are no true women in the world."

"I know nothing about your private affairs," he replied, hastily. "Pardon me if I have probed an unhealed wound."

"I assure you, George, that he don't," Maurice hastened to say. "I never told him a solitary thing."

"I don't care whether he knows or not," I said, for I felt in just that mood. "Look here, Doctor, my wife made life a hell while she lived with me, and wound up by running off with another man."

"Indeed!"

"It is true. I——"

He raised his hand and gave one of his disagreeable laughs.

"Pray spare me the details, Wylde. I have no doubt you were as much to blame as she was. Now with an easy divorce law, all this might have been avoided. As it is, your life is broken, your happiness destroyed, or at least you think so, for I have not the least doubt you will be idiot enough to try it again."

"Thank you for the compliment—no. I've had enough

of married life, but because I've been bitten it don't follow that marriage has brought the same unhappiness to every other man who has been bold enough to take the risk."

"Oh, of course not. Nobody claims that. But a woman must be the husband's slave to bring conjugal happiness. De Veber, ain't that so?"

"Don't ask me. I've never been married, and doubt if I ever shall be," laughed Maurice.

"Take my advice," said Philpot, "and you never will be; but just the same I'd like to have your ideas on the subject."

"You'd only laugh at them if I were to undertake to express them."

"Indeed no. I'm a bit cynical, I own, but every man has a right to his opinion."

"I don't think the marriage relation has ever been properly understood."

"And why so? I labored under the delusion that it was something which scarcely called for instruction."

"Doctor," said Maurice, slowly, "which was created first, the man or the woman?"

"Adam was the first man, Eve was the t'other, Cain was a wicked man, 'cause he killed his brother," laughed the Doctor. "That's the way the old rhyme runs."

"In which there is more truth than you may fancy. But I put Genesis aside, for it has nothing whatever to do with the conclusion I have reasoned myself into."

"Which is?"

"Substantially this," replied Maurice, lighting his cheroot by pressing it against a glowing coal. "I don't know that I shall be able to express myself, but I will try."

"I'm all attention, my dear fellow."

"Well then, here goes. There must have been a beginning, and in that beginning I believe that man and woman were actually one, being a complete object, a harmonious whole."

"On what do you base such a fancy, if not upon the Adamic tradition?"

"I can hardly tell you, but it is nevertheless my belief. Woman is but the half of a perfect human creation—you cannot look at her in any other way."

"Physically?"

"No, spiritually; or, if you like it better, mentally. In

the man the reasoning principle is uppermost and strongest; in the woman the principle of affection. Wisdom, knowledge, combined with the power of utilizing that knowledge and combined again with love, which embraces all the finer sentiments of human nature, is the power which controls the world. In God we have such a combination of qualifications. Man, made in the image of God, must, therefore, originally have possessed these qualities so combined. The necessities of man's future existence on this earth demanded a separation, and it was given. Hence we have men and women. The one possessed with wisdom, the other with affection. Marriage, therefore, becomes a positive necessity; for without it, man must ever remain an uncompleted work,"

"Rubbish!" broke out the Doctor. "You have been reading the works of some mediaeval mystic. I think I could name him if I chose."

"On the contrary, I have never read a line which conveys such notions. It is solely by thought and observation that I have reached these conclusions. A married man who is uncongenially mated, is simply one of the mistakes, and in no way affects my theory; an unmarried man is a half developed creature, and invariably a selfish one, full of evil qualities which, had he entered the true conjugal relation, would, to a great or less extent, have been eradicated. I'm afraid I don't make myself very plain."

"Your proposition is plain enough, but I can't endorse it," replied the Doctor. "How is it with you, Wylde?"

"Oh, it's too deep a thought for me." I answered. "I have never considered marriage in that light; but it is a known fact, that happily married persons grow to resemble one another in the course of years."

"Of course it is," replied Maurice. "Not only in outward appearance, but mentally to a far greater degree."

"Then you think that in the Milenium, men and women will actually become one? Two souls dwelling in one body?"

"Now you are quizzing," replied Maurice, "and 'tis time to call a halt. I don't claim that my theory has the virtue of novelty——"

"You'd better not. It's been written upon again and again."

"Yet, I repeat, I never read a line which helped me to

my way of thinking. Do you know I've often wondered if, perhaps, on some of the planets such a state of affairs did not actually exist."

"What a dreamy chap you are, to be sure, De Veber," said Philpot, yawning. "It would be a deuced disagreeable state of affairs if a fellow had to carry his wife about with him wherever he went. But I'm sick of the discussion, and my pipe is out. After I fill up—my dear boy I shall have to trouble you again for the tobacco bag—suppose we turn our attention to Mirrikh. A union of souls or a union of bodies is scarcely worth considering, but a union of black and white, or black and yellow, in a man's face we have seen to-night, and I, for one, am puzzled to death to understand what it means."

"And we might puzzle ourselves over it to all eternity, and then not understand it," said Maurice.

"Just so. Could you spare another nip of that brandy, De Veber? Ah, thanks! Yours truly! It shall be only a little one, for there's precious little left. Devilish good liquor that! I'll warrant you had it sent out to you from New York. Some favorite brand that you had been accustomed to drinking, no doubt."

"On the contrary, I bought it in Panompin," replied Maurice, "We Americans don't all drink spirits as the English do. I never tasted liquor until after I left for the East."

"Come now, that's pretty good!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Americans don't drink spirits like the English. Why man, I never knew the capacity of the human system to dispose of alcohol until I visited your Chicago, and that is not to be compared with some of the Canadian cities. But speaking of spirits, brings us by natural and easy stages to Spiritualism. Ardent spirits wandering down a fellow's gullet naturally suggests wandering spirits from another sphere ardently seeking to return to the scene of their earthly pains and pleasures. There, I throw down the gauntlet, boys. Spiritualism—Mirrikh. Mirrikh—Spiritualism. I don't care which is on top. Let the chairman of the committee on manifestations, materializations and mediumistic humbuggery, take it up and express his views."

"Bless my soul, Mr. Philpot, how you do rattle on," I answered, half angrily, as I threw a few fresh sticks on the fire. "What in the name of sense has Spiritualism got to do with Mirrikh? You don't consider him a ghost, I suppose?"

"I'm not so sure, Wylde. Not so sure."

"What do you mean? How can an agnostic believe in ghosts?"

"He cannot, as you understand the meaning of the word ghost, as the world understands it; but, like De Veber and his marriage views, I have an odd theory of my own on the subject of ghosts."

"And you are just dying to let it out, I suppose. Good; by all means let us have the great Philpot ghost theory. If it will explain the levitations of Mirrikh, the medal of the Angkor theosophical club is fairly yours."

"That's right, George. I'm glad to see you brightening up. Come, Philpot, let's have it. You claim that when man dies he goes to dust and there's the end of him, and now you profess to believe in ghosts. I am curious to see how you propose to reconcile all this."

"I go to show you, boys," was the Doctor's answer. "Hitherto I have maintained a discreet silence about this Mirrikh business, for I wanted to actually see the man before I expressed an opinion. Now that I have seen him I am ready to talk. Let us begin with the proposition, what is a ghost?"

"The disembodied spirit of some deceased person, of course," answered Maurice.

"There you are wrong. It is usually so considered, but it is by no means necessarily so. Indeed, if you were to investigate this subject as closely as I have done, you would find that the ghosts of living persons have as frequently put in an appearance as the so-called disembodied spirits of the dead."

"I have heard something of this before," said Maurice. "Indeed I had a friend who claimed to have repeatedly seen the shades of living people of whose presence at distant points at the time of their appearance he was most positive."

"Very good, my boy. Your friend is not alone in that. I, myself, have experienced the same thing. Hundreds of others have experienced it. Were such things recorded to the extent that similar appearances of dead persons have been, I firmly believe the world would be astounded. Take, for instance, the case of an old aunt of mine. When I was a boy, and living in London, she resided in Bristol. I was her favorite, and I must confess to a fondness for the dear old lady which I never felt for any one else. My father

died before I was born, and she was his sister, which, perhaps, accounts for it. But as I was about to say, I used occasionally to take a run down to Bristol to see my aunt. At first I always notified her of my intended visit, but upon one occasion I omitted to do so, and dropping in upon her one morning quite unexpectedly, was astonished to find a room all ready for me and breakfast prepared. 'I knew you were coming, Miles,' she said. 'You were here in this room last evening and told me so.' I was amazed; but never after that did I notify my aunt of my intended visits and never did I fail to find everything ready for my reception."

"Oh such impressions are common enough," said Maurice. "I could duplicate that story and give half a dozen more just like it."

"No doubt. So could almost any one. Let us admit, therefore, that a certain degree of intensity of thought may command the presence of the spirit of an absent living friend—I use the word spirit solely for want of another as expressive—why, then, may we not conclude that a still greater intensity of thought can produce the same phenomena on a grander scale? Why not admit that it can produce, not actual presence, perhaps—that would be levitation, and I don't admit levitation—but something so nearly akin to it that not only is our sense of sight deceived, but our senses of hearing and feeling as well."

"It would be almost as easy to admit levitation and be done with it," I said.

"Not at all. Bodily levitation is a manifest impossibility, but thought transference to the extent of deceiving each one of man's senses into the belief that he can actually see, hear, and feel the person who appears before him, is almost, if not quite, a proven fact."

"I cannot admit any such statement," said I.

"But if you knew the Indian Buddhists as I know them you would be forced into the admission," he replied. "I tell you the things they actually do are wonderful—totally unexplainable. Either we must admit the existence of a spiritual world which is all around us, or fall back on some such theory as this. I tell you, gentlemen, it is no uncommon thing for some of these adepts to summon into their presence not only living persons from great distances, but material forms of those who have been long dead. That

I nave seen myself; hundreds of others have seen it. When I said I have never seen levitation I meant what I said, for I never did see a living man taken up by invisible force and carried from one place to another, nor do I ever expect to see it: but I have seen forms of persons both living and dead, persons whom I knew and had known in life, produced before me by more than one adept, and that brings me to my ghost theory again."

"Which I am more than anxious to hear," said I. "Though your statements thus far are strong and your reasoning subtile, you have proved nothing. If there is no such thing as a disembodied spirit, how can you reason out the existence of ghosts?"

"In this way. Mesmerism, hypnotism, or whatever you are pleased to call it, is, of course, an admitted fact. There is a power existing in certain mental organizations enabling them to control weaker ones, and to deprive them for the time being of their individuality; to make them believe that black is white; that they are not themselves, but other people —living people, or dead people, it matters not which. Given such a mind, or such a mental state—for I believe that under certain favoring conditions a weak mind may possess this power quite as much as a strong one—and we have a force which can summon to our presence not only apparitions of living people but of dead ones. For instance, A possessed of this power desires to see B who is dead. The force leaves him just as the electric current leaves a battery. It cannot reach B because there is no B, but it does strike upon the mental receiver of C's organization, because C is of a receptive nature. Then C appears to A, but instead of appearing as C he appears as B, because A, by his intensity of thought, has transformed him into B. Thus while the shade of B is apparently raised, while it looks, acts and even speaks like B, it is, after all, nothing but a transfer of individuality. That, gentlemen, is my theory of ghosts. I fear it is not very clearly expressed."

"As clear as mud," I replied, sneeringly. "Frankly I got so befogged before you were half through that I could not follow you. How such a theory could possibly account for the strange disappearances of Mr. Mirrikh, I fail to see."

"Oh, I don't claim that it does," protested Philpot. "Of course it can't, unless, to go a step further, Mirrikh possesses the power I speak of to such an extent as to be able to

make us believe that we saw him on top of that tower when actually he was not there."

"Weak! Weak as water! Does that explain his *disappearance* in the Panompin alley?"

"I am constrained to admit, Wylde, that it does not."

"Then, as I understand it," said Maurice, who had until now maintained silence, "you claim the existence of a natural force, a mental magnetic current, which is capable of producing all the so-called spiritualistic phenomena with which the history of the world teems?"

"That's it! That's it! I firmly believe that just such a force exists and is as controlable as the electric current by those who understand its nature,"

"And understood by the Buddhist adepts?"

"I believe it."

"Is it not just as easy to believe that they possess the secret of some natural force which can overcome the attraction of gravatation?"

"Scarcely."

"It seems so to me. I have great difficulty in following your reasoning, but I understand the point toward which you are aiming, and was amazed at the labor you were at to get there. Just admit the existence of a spiritual world surrounding the natural world, and you have the easiest sort of solution of the whole matter."

"But I won't."

"But the Buddhists do."

"I know it."

"They do wonderful things, Doctor."

"I admit it."

"Many of our modern Spiritualists do similar things."

"I know that."

"As I said before, history teems with the relations of such occurences. You cannot name a nation where there are not individuals who claim free intercourse with the spirits of the dead."

"True again, but their claims are yet to be proved."

"I don't know," said Maurice dreamily. "I have puzzled my brains over the problem until I can think no more. Like you, Philpot, I demand proof; but this much I will say: I have reached the firm conclusion that there exist laws in nature, call them physical, or call them spiritual, understood only by certain persons, or exercised with-

out being fully comprehended by ignorant persons, that do produce phenomena, the true nature of which we are as yet wholly unable to comprehend."

"And by these laws you would explain the levitations of Mirrikh?" I yawned, for I was growing entirely sick of this lengthy discussion."

"I see no other way of explaining them."

"If we could only read this, we might get some light upon the subject," said the Doctor.

He thrust his hand into his coat pocket as he spoke, and pulled out the book which he had taken from Mr. Mirrikh's bag.

I was amazed—indignant.

"What? You can't have had the impudence to appropriate that book after all I said?" I angrily cried.

"There, there, Wylde, don't lose your temper again! I did keep it. I was curious to study it. I——"

"Give it to me!" I exclaimed, holding out my hand. "Until it is delivered to its owner, it is my property. Give it to me at once."

"Take it then, since you are going to be so savage about it," he replied sulkily; and he just tossed the book across the fire to my side. I tried to catch it, but failing, it went sprawling open upon the floor. Indeed, it had partly opened before he threw it, for I saw an envelope drop from between the leaves at Philpot's feet. When I picked the book up, he had already possessed himself of the envelope, and with the idea of stirring me still further, no doubt, coolly opened it, and now I saw him draw out a letter and hold it close to the fire's light.

"What is that?" asked Maurice. Philpot, who was glancing at the contents of the letter, did not immediately reply.

"Give it to me!" I cried. "It came out of the book."

"So it did. Astonishing!"

"What's astonishing?" asked Maurice.

"His impudence," said I. "Mr. Philpot, I demand that letter."

"Shut up, George!" cried Maurice. "Read it, Doctor; if it throws the least light upon the mystery of Mirrikh, read it by all means."

"On the contrary, my dear fellow, it only increases it. Wylde will you behave yourself?"

He pushed me aside when I reached over and attempted to possess myself of the letter, and did it with an ugly look in his eyes which warned me it was time to desist. Besides Maurice was against me, and I drew back sulkily to my own side of the fire and listened while Philpot read the following:—

"Dear Friend:—I greet you. Business of an important nature has kept me from fulfilling my promise to visit you this month. I have about completed my observations on the manners and social customs of China and Farther India, and now propose to visit that ancient shrine of the illuminati, Angkor, after which I shall probably return to Mars by way of Thibet. If you have any communication which you may desire to forward to the brethern in that planet, it would be well for you to embrace this opportunity, for there is no telling when another may occur. Prepare whatever may suggest itself, and I will drop in on you sometime before I depart for Thibet, but cannot at the present writing say just when. Would that you could be persuaded to accompany me, but I presume it would be quite useless to urge you further.

Yours, ever in the faith,

MIRRIKH.

Written at Panompin.

Mr. RADMA GUNGEET, Benares.

"There, Wylde, is your letter; you may have it now if you want it so bad. Since it is written in Hindustanee, it is not likely that I shall be contradicted by you as to the nature of its contents. Singular name that. Now I come to think of it, in Hindustanee, it means the planet Mars."

As the Doctor spoke, he tossed the sheet across the fire, just as the thunder, which for some time had been silent, came crashing about the tower with a rattle and roar which sent us all three to our feet.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MAN FROM ANOTHER WORLD.

"GREAT Heavens! What a crash!" cried Philpot, as he strode to the doorway to adjust the shawl, one end of which had been torn from its fastenings by the whirl of the wind. "Positively I thought this old rookery was coming down about our ears. There it goes again! By Jove! that was a blinder—look out boys, it's coming again!"

It came. In an instant, we heard the echoing roll of that stupendous conflict in progress among the clouds.

I threw more wood on the fire, but did not speak—I could not. This last had struck me dumb.

Not the thunder of course; I do not refer to that! It was the letter. Could it by any possibility be that—but no. It was too absurd.

Meanwhile Maurice had seated himself again and Philpot returned to the fire.

"It is a good thing I found it," he said. "It proves conclusively that the fellow is only a paltry trickster after all. No doubt the letter was written for your express benefit Wylde. He has some object in view in crossing your path as he does, you may rest assured."

"Have you formed so low an estimate of my intelligence Doctor, that you think for an instant I could believe such a claim as that letter puts forth?"

"No—oh, no! I was only joking."

"How dumb you are! Can't you see that the letter is a cipher—that the allusions to Mars mean something altogether different—that——"

"Do you believe that George?" interposed Maurice.

"I do indeed."

"Then I don't."

"What!" cried the Doctor. "De Veber, for gracious sake don't let your love of the occult carry you too far!"

"I did not say I believed what the letter hints at. I say it is not a cipher. I stick to it. No man would write a

cipher that way. His eagerness to recover the letter proves that it was nothing of the sort."

"And I," persisted Philpot, "believe that Wylde is right, and has hit the true solution. A journey to Mars! Transmigration to another planet! By Jove! that beats all the Buddhistic claims which have come to my knowledge yet. When I was a lad I used to dream of such a possibility, but——"

"But it is a startling conclusion to our acquaintance with Mr. Mirrikh," interrupted Maurice. "If he can levitate from one tower of the Nagkon Wat to the other, why not from one planet to another?"

"Gad!" cried the Doctor suddenly slapping his knee. "I have it!"

"What is it?" I exclaimed.

"A thought—a remembrance—a curious coincidence all in one."

"Out with it, Doctor," said Maurice.

"Years ago I read a curious book written by an eighteenth century religious lunatic—you may have heard of him—Emmanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish seer."

"I have heard of him, but never read any of his works. A sort of Spiritualist on a mild scale was he not?"

"Something that way. I have read but little of him myself, but I recollect this particular book because of the sublime impudence of its claim."

"Which was?"

"That he had visited several of the planets in the spirit—among the rest the planet Mars."

"Well?"

"Oh, I'm coming to it. Among other things he states that a portion of the inhabitants of Mars have faces which are black below and white above."

"My stars! You don't mean it!" cried Maurice.

"He does. He says just that. Now I see it all. Mirrikh is a fraud. He has been playing upon the credulity of the Benares Buddhists. His face is painted to help bear out his claim."

"It must be so," I cried. "Doctor you have hit it."

"I'm sure of it!" said Philpot. "Would that he were here now. I could make the charge to his face. Oh, depend upon it, he is a shrewd rascal——hark! What is that!"

We listened.

Above the howl of the storm I could distinctly hear strange sounds proceeding apparently from that part of the tower which lay above us. Musical sounds—a voice singing, or rather chanting a strain so weird and dismal that it made my very blood run cold.

"Mirrikh, by all that's holy!" ejaculated the Doctor. "The fakir has kept his word! He said that we should have a visit from him to-night."

"Listen! listen!" breathed Maurice, raising his hand. "Could anything be grander, more solemn, more entirely in harmony with our strange surroundings?"

We listened breathlessly; even Philpot seemed to experience the influence of that wild, mournful strain which echoed down from the obscurity above us, reminding me most forcibly of the opening measures of the "Wolfschlücht" in Der Freischütz, being a series of prolonged shakes in a minor key, with an occasional break into melody, followed by an instant return to the shake again.

Suddenly this ceased and a moment of stillness followed, and then began a movement of a wholly different sort.

"Gad!" broke in the Doctor; "the top of the tower must be filled with people! No one voice could produce such sounds as those."

"Hark! Hark!" whispered Maurice. "Was anything ever so heavenly, so divine!"

Now I am not much of a musician. I perform on no instrument nor do I sing, but I love music and in my time have attended operas and philharmonics sufficient to know something of what is what, and I can truthfully affirm that no more remarkable performance was ever heard by the ears of mortal man.

Beginning in low, sweet, sympathetic strains, which re-reminded me of the opening of the Larghetto in the Second Symphony, it rose by a gentle crescendo until it seemed to fill the whole of that gloomy interior, then falling again into melody which stirred the inmost depths of my soul.

Now the motive became more strident, and rising above the thunder which was again cracking outside, there came a succession of sounds harmonizing with the fury of the elements to a degree fairly enchanting, It was not one voice, but many; it could not have been produced otherwise, I was reflecting, when suddenly the chorus ceased, and but one

voice was heard, and that deep and sonorous, rising and falling until at length it appeared to die away in the distance, and profound stillness pervaded the interior of the tower once more.

For several seconds no one spoke.

"Wonderful!" breathed Maurice at last. "Never in all my life have I listened to music so heavenly. George, what can it mean?"

"I propose to find out what it means," cried the Doctor, seizing a burning brand from the fire. "Follow me, gentlemen. We shall soon know."

He moved towards the stone staircase which communicated with the upper portion of the tower. What the sensations of my friend De Veber may have been I cannot say, but I know mine, as we followed, were those of deepest awe.

As we ascended, the silence remained unbroken. Presently we reached the floor above, the Doctor flashed his torch about, but we could discern no one. The circular chamber in which we found ourselves was untenanted; the rain was beating in through the solitary window with wild fury and I found myself wondering where all the water went to and why it had not long ago come pouring down about our heads.

"No one here!" breathed Philpot. "We must try the next floor above."

We pushed on, but we might as well have spared ourselves the effort. There was no one to be found on that floor nor on the next, nor the next still.

Here the stairs came to an end. Nothing but a dilapidated wooden ladder remained, communicating with a small square opening like a scuttle, only there was no cover. Resolved to leave no portion of the tower unexplored, the Doctor even ascended to the opening, reporting nothing but the darkened vault of the heavens beyond.

We could go no further now, and just then a gust of wind extinguished the torch which Philpot had given Maurice to hold. A bat with flapping wings, disturbed by our intrusion, flew past my face, startling me more than I would have cared to own; just then the Doctor came hurrying down the ladder with an imprecation upon our want of success.

"By Jove! boys, this is most mysterious!" he exclaimed. "There's no one in the tower but ourselves—that's just as sure as fate."

"I knew it!" I answered. "I'm going down."

"Stay! We will light up first. I have matches."

"You can't do it in this draught," said Maurice? "I'm going back. I've had enough of it up here."

The attempt to light the brand proved futile. Without waiting to see the result, I had already started. The shadows oppressed me. I had had quite enough of them and was anxious to get back to our retreat on the ground floor.

Last to ascend, I was first on the stairs going back. My mental state spurred me on, and I reached the top of the last flight before Maurice and the Doctor had started on the one above.

Now, as I hurried down, my eyes naturally fixed themselves upon the fire, and I perceived that a man stood beside it with his back turned toward me, warming his hands by the blaze.

Instantly that same cold sensation came upon me, and in the same moment I saw that the man was Mirrikh. The next—I will swear that I never removed my eyes from him—and I perceived that the spot which he had occupied before the fire was vacant—Never pausing even to wonder, I dashed on, but when I reached the fire, he was no longer there.

I was glad of it. I had no wish to see him. Past being amazed at any phenomena which might present itself in connection with this man, I never even looked behind the statue to see if he was in hiding, never stopped to consider whether I had been the victim of an illusion or had actually seen him. It seemed useless to disturb myself about this mysterious person any longer, so I just shouted to my companions and bade them make haste, telling what I had seen when they reached my side.

Maurice said nothing, but Philpot was entirely incredulous. He took another brand from the fire and passed behind the big stone Buddha, calling out that there was no one concealed there. In no other part of the enclosure could a man have successfully hidden, so we found ourselves just where we started out.

"It won't wash, Wylde," said the Doctor, coarsely. "You didn't see him."

"But I did, though."

"An optical illusion. You were scared, puzzled; thinking of Mirrikh is what brought it about."

"And you—did you hear that music, or was it an aural illusion?" I retorted.

"Gad! But we all heard that."

"Account for it."

"I can't!"

"Then in heaven's name don't talk to me of optical illusions, when—" The words fairly froze upon my lips. I stood staring at the shawl which Maurice had hung before the door, a prey to sensations which simply beggar description. Maurice's back was turned, and so was the Doctor's, thus they saw nothing, and, so far as the latter was concerned, it was just as well. But I saw a head come through that shawl—Mirrikh's head, with the face uncovered—I swear I saw it—it is useless for me to attempt to unpersuade myself, though I have tried it again and again.

Not through any rent or opening in the shawl. Oh, no! Not that! It seemed to pass directly through the fabric itself as if the cohesive attraction of each particle were for the instant destroyed, not assuming its full form until at least three seconds had elapsed. First I saw the forehead, the parti-colored face and the hair form on the inside of the shawl. Then the eyes fitted themselves below the brow, and the nose and mouth appeared, last coming that black and beardless chin, and then I beheld the entire head in perfect outline floating in the air.

Dumb with amazement I neither moved nor spoke.

Now I saw the shadowy outline of a body beneath the head, and suddenly a detached hand appeared, then the other hand, then the legs, and then——

"What's the matter, George! What is it, old fellow? For heaven sake speak to me," I could hear Maurice saying.

I had fainted!

I lay upon the stone floor beside the fire with Maurice bending over me on one side and Philpot on the other. They were chafing my hands, Maurice's face expressing the deepest concern.

I tried to answer—tried to pull myself together, and I did it—did it in spite of another shock, for, raising my eyes I saw Mr. Mirrikh standing near the fire fumbling in a pocket medicine case. Mirrikh in full form and not chopped up like a Chinese puzzle. It was the man I had met at Panompin; the man I had seen on the tower of the

Nagkon Wat; the man who had saved the Doctor from the fury of the tiger; Mirrikh in full flesh, as tangible and material as Philpot or Maurice; and when from his face I turned my eyes toward the shawl, there it hung before the door swaying with the wind, not a rent in it—not even the pins by which the Doctor had fastened it to the wood-work disturbed.

"George! George!" called Maurice. "Speak! Don't look that way if you have the least consideration for my feelings. Old fellow, all this has been too much——"

"It's all right," I interrupted. "Nothing ails me. Let me get up, will you? I shall be right in a moment."

"Nothing ails you? What do you mean then by frightening us to death, tumbling over into the fire?" Philpot cried. But I never heeded him. I sprang up just in time to meet the eyes of that wonderful man.

"Mr. Wylde! I am very sorry. I am afraid my abrupt entrance startled you," he said gently. "You have had a hard day of it; and the storm has affected your nerves. Try a few drops of this mixture. It will put you right in a moment. You need not be afraid of it—it is a simple remedy prepared by myself."

"I don't want any of it," I answered almost roughly. "Maurice, your brandy flask."

I drank before attempting to speak again. Not for worlds would I have tasted the contents of that bottle then.

"How came he here?" I whispered to my friend.

"Positively I don't know, George. I saw you fall and sprang to catch you. When I looked up, there he was."

I shuddered and said no more. Just then my eyes discovered another mystery. Mr. Mirrikh wore the same clothing as usual, and every stitch was as dry as the traditional bone!

Philpot, however, was in no mood for silence. I could see by the way his eyes snapped that he was all ready for the fray.

"Probably it was your sudden appearance among us, sir, that startled Mr. Wylde," he began—we were standing, Maurice and I, on one side of the fire, and they two on the other—"positively you startled even me."

"For which I am very sorry. If Mr. Wylde will only consent to take a few drops——"

"Which he wont. Look here, sir, where did you come from?"

"From the forest," he replied with singular mildness. "Surely you have not forgotten your encounter with the tiger so soon?"

"Were you not here a moment ago?" cried the Doctor, ignoring the allusion.

"Did you see me here, sir?"

"No sir, but Wylde did."

"I was here. I stepped out for a moment; now I am here again."

"Faith, I see you are! Would you be obliging enough to inform me how you managed to escape a wetting?"

"By a very simple process, sir."

"Name it."

"When it began to rain I went inside."

"What!"

"Did you fail to catch my words?"

"I failed to catch their significance."

"Really, then I am at a loss to know how I can explain myself more fully."

"Do you mean to tell us that you have been in this tower ever since it began to rain?"

"I came here before the rain began."

"And where, pray, have you been since?"

"In one of the chambers above. I answer your questions, sir, simply from politeness. I deny your right to interrogate me; but go on to your heart's content."

"I propose to," replied the Doctor, coolly. "You say you have been up stairs all the time we have been down stairs. May I inquire if it was you who favored us with an exhibition more or less musical, a few moments ago?"

"I was singing—yes, sir."

"Alone?"

"If you had come up you would have found no one with me."

"We did go up and we could not find even you."

"For an excellent reason, sir. When you came up, I was no longer there."

"Where were you?"

"Here."

"Will you have the kindness to inform me by what means you got here?"

"No."

"That settles it," cried the Doctor, roughly. "I knew you couldn't explain. I've nothing further to say."

He turned his back abruptly upon Mr. Mirrikh, seated himself by the fire and began to smoke.

He was angry—very angry. In his supreme conceit he had flattered himself that he could show my Panompin friend in the light of a charlatan after the first question or two. In this he had lamentably failed.

Meanwhile Maurice, who had never uttered a word, seated himself again, and now pulled me down beside him; Mr. Mirrikh, however, did not sit down, but just stood there with his hands spread out to catch the warmth, gazing into the fire meditatively. Twice, in the silent moments which followed, I saw him look at Maurice curiously, and once he looked at me.

By this time my equanimity was pretty well restored and I can assure you that I felt quite ashamed of what had occurred. I resolved to settle the mystery of this man once and for all, and I sat there gazing at him trying to assure myself against my reason, that his face was painted as Philpot had claimed, for reason following the dictates of two excellent eyes, told me that it was not. I could not seize him and try the effect of a wet rag upon his chin, though I own that I was itching to do that very thing.

Now Maurice breaks the silence. Just as determined as Philpot, his diplomacy is greater, or his personal sphere more persuasive. He accomplishes with one question what the Doctor fails to accomplish with a dozen.

"You said the other morning that you sometimes smoked," he remarked, pleasantly. "Won't you join us now?"

"Thank you. I have no objection."

He chose a spot near me and sat down, accepting the proffered cheroot and lighting it by the blowing coals.

"You will pardon our friend, I know," said Maurice; "but one naturally feels a desire to account for the singular experiences we have had in this tower to-night. We are storm bound, Mr. Mirrikh, and, with the possible exception of yourself, all of us have got to stay here till morning. You cannot wonder at our curiosity. Why not gratify it? Wylde is your friend, I would like to be, and as for Mr. Philpot——"

"Oh, count me in," blurted out the Doctor, "I have not forgotten that Mr. Mirrikh saved my life."

"Gentlemen," he said, after puffing meditatively for a moment, "I have nothing but the friendliest feelings toward

you, nor in fact toward any one else. All God's creatures are my friends, and in a fashion I try to love them all; for by loving his creatures I adore the Almighty himself. White or black, red or yellow, it makes no difference; men are men, intelligence is intelligence. What is it to me that you are representatives of a race widely different from my own?"

"Your views are most broad and harmonize with mine exactly," replied Maurice; "but can you wonder at our curiosity——"

"I do not wonder at it."

"Then gratify it."

"That would be impossible."

"Why so?"

"For an excellent reason. The intelligence of neither one of you has been cultivated to the point of understanding any explanation I could make."

"I beg to differ with you!" cried Philpot. "Try us and see. If you were up stairs how the devil did you get down stairs without running against us? If you were alone up there, how happens it that we hear——"

"Pardon me. You heard me singing."

"How many voices do you usually keep about you? I'll swear I heard at least six at once."

"As I was saying, Mr. De Veber," continued Mirrikh, ignoring the question; "it is useless for me to attempt to explain what your minds—and I say it without the slightest desire to cast reflection—are incapable of comprehending. You ask me how I passed down from the top of the tower to the bottom without meeting you on the stairs——"

"I beg your pardon, I didn't ask it," said Maurice; "but I'd like to."

"And I would like to answer but I cannot, further than to say that in doing what I did—and I don't deny that I did it—I simply put into action a force as purely natural as the force of gravitation. Further than this I do not care to go."

"Prove the existence of such a force by exerting it now," I said. "By your strange conduct I have been placed in a most ambiguous position. I'm entitled to some consideration on that account if for no other reason."

"Mr. Wylde! Is it so? I deeply regret it," he exclaimed, in a tone of concern. "Still I am no charlatan. I cannot

exhibit my powers for the asking. Why, what is this? Can it be possible! My book!"

There it lay open upon the floor just where I had thrown it. I had forgotten its existence, but now as he leaned back and picked it up I could do no less than make some explanation.

The attempt was a lame one I fear, but he listened in polite silence. I did not tell him who opened the bag, but he seemed to understand instinctively that it was not I.

Just as I ceased speaking, the thunder began crashing again. I remember that there was a particularly fearful clap when he opened the book, and running the pages over hastily began to read.

What he read—and he began it without the slightest explanation—was the report of a committee appointed by a theosophic society in England to examine into the claims of a noted Spiritualist who professed to have been bodily levitated through an open, third story window; not once, but frequently, with the power to control his levitations to a certain extent, although admitting ignorance as to how he was taken, where he went, or by what means he was brought back. The report of the committee was to the effect that they, on several occasions—always in the dark—did actually witness the levitation of this individual. The names signed were those of a clergyman, a noted barrister and a baronet, who to his other distinctions was able to add the M. P. Altogether it was just about the most remarkable reading I ever listened to. If I chose I could furnish names and dates, but as I propose to confine myself strictly to the matters which came under my own observation, I forbear.

"You have heard?" he said quietly, as he concluded. "In your own sober England, Mr. Philpot, precisely what I have done on several occasions with which you may be more or less acquainted, has been done. Need I say more?"

"It would be a trifle more satisfactory if you would," returned the Doctor seriously. "I have read of this business before. That medium has since been exposed as a fraud."

"Was the secret of his levitation exposed?"

"No. I understand not."

Simply the man was caught cheating at some other trick?"

"So far as I have heard that is all. He pretended to materialize a spirit, which proved to be himself."

"You see now how wise I am. It would never do for me to claim too much, or I should run the risk of being classed in the same category as this Englishman. I tell you I possess no supernatural powers. What I did was done on purely scientific principles. But it is quite useless for me to attempt to explain."

He raised the book by the cover and shook it slightly.

Of course I knew what he was seeking for. I was prepared, too. I had the letter in my hand, having taken it out of my pocket unobserved, for he was not looking at me, and I now reached over and laid it upon his lap.

"There is your letter, Mr. Mirrikh," I began. "I am sorry it has been opened, but——"

"Look here!" cried the Doctor; "there's no use mincing matters. I opened that letter, Mr. Mirrikh, and I did it in opposition to Wylde's particular request."

For a moment there was a dead silence.

To my intense relief, however, Mr. Mirrikh seemed in no way disturbed.

He took up the envelope, removed the letter and hastily perused it. Then restoring it to the envelope again he thrust it into his pocket, and for a moment just sat there blowing the smoke from his mouth in rings. Presently he looked up with a half sarcastic smile.

"You have all read this letter, gentlemen, I presume?"

"I read it aloud," replied the Doctor.

"Precisely. That amounts to the same thing. May I ask you what you think of its contents?"

He was asking too much. Even the Doctor's impudence was not equal to repeating the remarks he had previously made

"None of you speak," he continued; "so I see that I must manage this business myself. If I chose I could easily avoid the issue by leaving you—Mr. Wylde knows how easily—but I shall not do this. I have long been of the opinion that the day is at hand when many matters understood only by a narrow circle of Oriental adepts, should be given to the world at large. Possibly this is my mission; I have for some time suspected it. Possibly my meeting with Mr. Wylde at Panompin was but the preliminary step toward the fulfilment of this mission; at all events I shall permit myself so to consider it, and——"

"And what?" exclaimed Maurice, eagerly. Philpot had the grace to hold his tongue.

"And ask you to repeat the question which you put to me on the tower of the Nagkon Wat, Mr. De Veber."

"What question? I put several—you answered none."

"I will answer any question you may now ask, freely."

He arose and stood before us with a graceful dignity that impressed us all.

"Question me," he repeated. "I am ready."

"Then in God's name, tell us who you are and where you came from!" blurted out the Doctor.

He smiled, folding his arms as we had seen him do before.

"Gentlemen," he said slowly, "your curiosity shall be gratified. I am a man from the planet Mars!"

BOOK II.

THE TRANSMIGRATION OF A SOUL.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE TRAVELERS IN THIBET.

"SHUT the door!"

No wonder the Doctor said it.

The man who can leave the door open when the thermometer stands at 10 degrees Fah. below zero, is lacking in consideration for his fellow man, to say the least.

"Shut the door!" roared the Doctor, a second time.

"Shut the door!"

"Maurice! Maurice! Rouse yourself old man!" I called, adding my voice to that of the Rev. Miles Philpot, which needed no addition, being a host in itself.

Maurice De Veber gave a start; turning, he stared at me for a second in a dazed fashion which had become common with him of late, and then, with a sudden movement forward, the very energy of which showed that he had at last reached a realization of the fact that the Doctor and I were rapidly freezing, slammed the door of the inn at Zhaduan.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, turning toward the k'ang, upon which the Rev. Miles Philpot lay sprawled out in the most undignified fashion, when you come to consider his cloth. I sat beside him with my legs doubled under me like a Turk or a tailor, trying to keep from freezing above while being slowly toasted below.

"It's all very well to beg a fellow's pardon after you've let in several hundred thousand litres of cold air, French measure," grumbled the Doctor; "what I would like to know is why you opened the door at all?"

Maurice laughed; then out came the inevitable pipe—that

dear old bit of blackened briar wood which I remember so well.

"Astronomical observations," he replied lightly; "never in all my life have I seen such a wonderful display. Orion is glorious, Sirius shines with a brilliancy positively amazing, and as for the Pleiades——"

"Oh, hang the Pleiades!" broke in the Doctor. "I understand it now—you were looking at Mars."

"And fell into one of your dreamy fits," I added; "in spite of the risk you ran of supplying pneumonia for three."

"You've hit it, George! You've hit it. Keep it up. I deserve it all."

"Keep up nothing," grumbled the Doctor. "I wish that rascal, Ah Schow, would get back with the argols to start up this fire; we'll be sure to see the last of it in twenty minutes if he don't."

"One wouldn't think so from the way the k'ang feels now," laughed Maurice, jumping upon it, and sitting there with his feet dangling down while he lit the pipe. "The temperature is quite Cambodian beneath and decidedly Thibetan above. What we need is equalization. How's that, Doctor? Ain't it about so?"

"Upon my word," grumbled the Doctor, "we need so many things that I've given up thinking about them, and take everything as it comes. Most of all we need common sense enough to give up this whole crazy business and start back to Calcutta before it is too late."

"Hark! What was that?" I exclaimed suddenly.

Outside the hut a shrill cry had sounded.

It was the "sok! sok!" of the camel driver. A sound no one is likely to forget in a hurry who has had the ill-fortune to travel in Thibet.

Maurice leaped off the k'ang and seized his rifle, which stood leaning against the unplastered wall of the inn. As for the Doctor, he displayed the effects of his American training by the quick motion his hand made toward his hip pocket.

"The fun begins, boys!" he exclaimed. "Some one is coming. I felt it in my bones that fate wouldn't let us have a quiet night here by ourselves."

We were all three at the door in an instant, almost upsetting Ah Schow, our Chinese cook at the Nagkon Wat, who was in the act of entering with an armful of argols; dried

camel's dung, the only fuel obtainable and that universally employed to heat the k'ang in Thibet.

"Sok! Sok! Sok!" came the cry again, echoing back from the rocky walls of the mountain pass which lay below us.

Ah Schow informed us that a caravan was coming up, and experience had taught us that Ah Schow, as a rule, when he made a definite and positive statement, was pretty apt to tell the truth.

And while we stand there at the inn door waiting to prove the statement of our *chef*, let me make a statement on my own account.

We were in Thibet.

We were three travellers journeying through an unknown land, bound on the craziest quest in which ever man engaged.

If any one wishes to put me down as a lunatic after hearing what I have to tell, why I can only say that I would be the last to blame him. In fact, just about that time I was beginning to work around to the same opinion myself.

Now you will not find Zhad-uan put down upon the maps of Thibet· still less will it pay to look for the deserted inn which we had taken possession of that night, never guessing that the town—it consisted of a lamasery and a dozen or two mud houses—was only five miles further on, just over the mountain, on the other slope.

In truth there are no maps of Thibet of any value. If any one of the few travellers who has succeeded in penetrating the country has given a reliable map to the world I never saw it; as for the ordinary ones in the atlas, no two agree, and I vouch for it that all are equally absurd.

Nevertheless here we were in the land of the Grand Lama in spite of the lack of a map, and not a week's journey distant from that most mysterious of cities, Lh'asa.

Scores of travellers have tried it, each failing signally; few were ever heard of once they had crossed the Thibetan frontier.

Would our fate be different from those who had gone before us into this mysterious land?

God alone knew, on that night when we three stood at the inn door, listening to the cries of the camel drivers. For my part, although not an obstacle had thus far been put in our path by human hands, I had doubts, grave doubts, whether I should ever leave the land of the Tale Lama alive.

But how to explain our motives for this singular journey?

I feel that it is a case where preliminary words and finely turned phrases would be wasted, and entire frankness will pay the best.

Here it is then—make the most of it.

I, George Wylde, my friend Maurice De Veber, late American Consul at Panompin, and the ubiquitous Philpot, were supposed to be on our way to the planet Mars!

There! I have said it, and now I feel better. Laugh at us for idiots if you will; put me down as a monstrous falsifier; treat my statement in any way that best pleases you. I can only hold up my right hand and say solemnly: "It is the truth!"

Of course it is scarcely necessary for me to add that my parti-colored acquaintance, Mr. Mirrikh, was at the bottom of it. That goes without saying, I suppose.

I will mention, however, that the beginning of our folly dates from that night when we found ourselves storm bound in the old Siamese tower; from the moment when that levitating individual gravely announced himself as a man from Mars.

And the rest of his story?

Reader, I dare not tell it; but I will mention that at this time I did not know it. It is, however, too utterly improbable to excite belief, even in the mind of a full-fledged 19th Century Buddhist, who, if you were to claim to have been transported bodily from Benares to Boston in twenty seconds, would not doubt your statement in the least.

Yet Mr. Mirrikh made his assertion with such quiet dignity, that while he spoke he almost carried me away with him; almost made me believe in a vast realm of disembodied spirits all about us, controlling our every action, our very thoughts,

"It is quite useless to talk to you Europeans about these things Wylde"—I remember distinctly the very intonations of his voice as he said it—"quite useless, I assure you, for the reason that you look upon this world as the world of causes, while in reality it is only the world of effects, a mere shadowy reflection of the vast realm of the unseen."

"But," I answered, "you must make us some explanation. Here you have boldly asserted something which to our minds seems an utter impossibility; that you are an inhabitant of another planet; not satisfied with this, you tell us that

you propose to return to the earth from whence you came, and then cap the climax by offering to take any one of us along."

We were still sitting together around the fire in the old stone tower when this conversation took place, for you may rest assured that after the astonishing statement made by Mr. Mirrikh with which the last chapter closed, we had no notion of letting him go until he had fully explained.

But could we have held him if he had chosen to depart?

If experience went for anything, most certainly we could not. I know now, as I knew then, that my friend Mirrikh could have left us instantly if he had so desired—left us in spite of all the bolts, bars or stone walls which we might have interposed.

Few of my readers—if indeed I ever find any—will believe that this is the simple truth; and yet it is so; and what is more, few who have traveled through India observantly will question it.

If a fakir can bring a dog down from a clear sky out of nothingness, or can climb a ladder held upright beneath the vault of heaven, and pulling it up after him, vanish ladder and all, why that which I claim for my man is but baby play. And these statements have been vouched for by unquestioned authorities. I have alluded to them before, but I bring them up again in order that, placed side by side with my claim for Mr. Mirrikh, I may have the right to demand at least equal consideration for both.

I remember well just how he looked at me; remember the curious, far-away expression upon Maurice's face, which in the light of after events, seemed almost prophetic. Never shall I forget the utter contempt with which the Rev. Philpot treated his claims.

But nothing seemed to ruffle Mr. Mirrikh. In fact as I look back upon all our intercourse, I can now see that the only thing which ever did disturb him was the fear of disturbing others with the singularity of his face and the wild impossibility of his claims. His was the assured calmness and complete unity of purpose which we have been taught to look for in angels; and truth compels me to confess that when long in his presence I was as nothing; as an individual entity I seemed to have been annihilated; never until I knew this man had I been able to grasp the idea of the Buddhist Nirvana, where God is all and all is God. And

this is the true Nirvana, unrecognized even by the great majority of Buddhists who use the word.

"Friend Wylde," he said, in answer to my demand; "I am at as great a loss to know how to meet your mental condition as you are at a loss to meet mine; and yet with the exception of a few facts which are the property of my friends the Hindu adepts, there is not a secret I possess not freely yours to-night."

Here was the Doctor's chance, and he lost no time in embracing it.

"Look here, my friend, are we all three included in that deal?" he demanded.

"You are."

Mr. Mirrikh bowed with easy grace.

"And you will answer any question I may ask which does not concern the secrets of the adepts?"

"I will."

"I'm going to question you."

"You are welcome to do so."

"Am I? Wait! First, what do you use to paint your face with, and why do you paint it at all?"

Not by the least look or gesture did Mr. Mirrikh show himself ruffled.

"Examine my face," he said, in the calmest of tones.

"It is not necessary."

"Pardon me, but it is necessary. I demand it."

"Humph! Can't you see that I understand?"

"Understand what?"

"That some disease has colored your face. I thought it was painted and wanted to try you; but when you consent——"

"Stop! I demand that you examine my face before you ask another question."

The Doctor hesitated no longer.

"Your face is not artificially colored sir," he said constrainedly, after he had looked and felt to his heart's content.

"What do you make out of it?"

"I can make nothing out of it. It is a face built in opposition to any physiological law I know anything about. You have probably had some disease unknown outside of the East."

"You are wrong. Had you ever been in the planet you call Mars, you would know better. Such faces, though not universal, are common there."

"Don't talk ridiculous rubbish."

"I beg your pardon—I am only stating a fact."

"I won't listen to it," snapped the Doctor, showing downright temper. "You're a good one—there's no doubt on that score—you beat the deck! But when you try to stuff me with that Mars business, you go a shade too far."

"As you did when you opened my letter and exposed my secret, sir. You have brought this on yourself."

"By gracious, he has you there, Doctor!" put in Maurice, rousing himself from the reverie into which he had fallen.

"Not that I blame you," continued Mr. Mirrikh; "under similar circumstances no doubt I would have done just as you did; but when you utterly discredit my statements——"

"Stuff and nonsense! Do you expect a man of my intelligence to believe that a human body can be transported from one planet to another?"

"No, sir. I do not expect it."

"Then why say it?"

"I did not say it."

"What am I to understand by that, when you most assuredly did?"

"You may understand whatever you please. The fact remains that to transport a human body from the planet Mars to this earth is quite impossible, as you say."

"Yet you claim that on Mars it is customary to have faces like yours. You assert that you are a man from Mars."

"Yes."

"First you speak one way and then another."

"I speak consistently, my friend. I was born in Mars, but this body which you see never left this earth, of course."

"Oh, pshaw! Now we are getting at it," sneered Philpot. "Some rubbishing re-incarnation nonsense. I thought as much."

Then it was that he said it—spoke the words which turned the whole tide of my life.

"It is nothing of the sort," he began, fixing his eyes on Maurice in a way that I have seen Hindu snake charmers fix theirs upon the deadly cobra. "My claim is that while *your* soul is fast to your body, I can as easily take *my* soul out of my body as you can pull your hand out of a glove or your foot out of a boot. When I told you that I was a man from Mars I stated the truth; when I told you that I was going to return to that planet and would be pleased to take

one or all three of you back with me, I spoke the truth again. Nothing could be plainer than I am speaking now; but you do not comprehend me, and it will be useless to attempt to make you understand."

"Might I inquire if there is any way of getting back again to the earth?" asked the Doctor, with a sneer.

"Oh, yes. You can come back whenever you please."

"Do you go by balloon, or flying machine; or is it——"

"Stop! You cannot make me angry, so you may as well spare yourself the effort. My race have no such passion as anger. I will simply state that the means by which we go is one of the secrets I have promised to keep. If you decide to accompany me, the means will be furnished at the proper time."

"Well, I don't know as I should mind a trip to Mars provided I could get back again. I say, Maurice, how does it strike you?"

"I am listening," answered Maurice, quietly.

"How long would it take?" inquired the Doctor.

"That," replied Mr. Mirrikh, "would depend entirely upon how long you cared to remain in Mars; the passage through the realm of spirit cannot be measured by time; it would be no longer than a thought."

"Oh! We go by way of the spirit world, do we?" Well, my friend, I want you to understand that I, as a clergyman, with every opportunity to inform myself, utterly deny the existence of the so-called soul of man after death."

It was amusing to see Philpot draw himself up as he made this statement, but it was a positive study to see the expression of pity which came over the face of my singular friend.

"For me to hear you deny the existence of a spiritual world, is precisely as it would be for you to hear me deny the existence of that little island called Great Britain, on the ground that I had never seen it."

"Prove it! Prove your spirit world!" cried the Doctor, excitedly. "I can argue all night on that point, and ——"

"And you will have to argue with some one else then, for I have said my last word. Mr. De Veber, how is it with you?" Will you return with me to Mars?"

Was Maurice hypnotized?

I have often thought so, for he turned a face toward us so altered in its appearance, so radiant with enthusiasm, that I should scarcely have known it as his.

"Yes," he answered; "I will go to Mars with you Mr. Mirrikh. When do we start?"

"Let him alone! Take your eyes off him!" I shouted, suddenly springing to my feet as a peal of crashing thunder shook the old tower again. "You shan't hypnotize him! You shan't ——"

"Sit down, Mr. Wylde! Sit down?"

What was the matter?

Everything seemed swimming before me, and yet all that Mr. Mirrikh had done was to extend his hand.

Was I also being hypnotized?

Then what of the Doctor?

Why the Doctor just sat there as motionless and rigid as the big stone stone Buddha on the other side of the fire, and all because Mirrikh had waved the other hand at him.

I sat down. More than that, I did not get up again, for in an instant I was nobody—nowhere—nothing—simply *nil.*

The next thing I knew it was broad daylight and there was Maurice just coming through the open door of the tower from which the shawl had been taken down; there also was Doctor Philpot lying stretched upon the stone floor snoring lustily; there was the big stone Buddha with its broken nose, frowning down upon us; there was everything but Mirrikh, and he was not.

Was it all a dream?

Had he ever been there at all? If so, where did the reality end and the dream begin?

Hello, George! So you have waked up at last, have you?" Maurice exclaimed, as his eyes rested upon me. "Time, too, I must say. Your friend has been gone this hour. I walked down to the place where we met the tiger with him. Wonderful man! I've made a regular engagement with him George. I am to meet him at the Lamasery of Psamdagong, in Thibet, on the 18th of December. You are to go with me, and Doc shall go along too, if he wants to. I tell you, George, there never was such a glorious proposition made to mortal man. I shall be talked of all over the civilized world; I shall visit every court in Europe; and as for scientific men they will come round me in droves. I shall write a book about it, and ——"

"Hold on! Hold on! What in the name of sense are you talking about?" I shouted.

Then came the answer, just as I had expected.

"Talking about? Why you must know, George. I am talking about going with your friend Mirrikh back to Mars."

"Hypnotized, hopelessly hypnotized!" I groaned. "Oh! Maurice!"

Was it true?

Had that amazing man from Panompin controlled Maurice De Veber's will so completely as to make him believe that it was possible to take his soul out of his body, transport it to the planet Mars and bring it back again?

Reader, he had!

Not that he controlled mine or the Doctor's, but poor Maurice he had hard and fast.

I believe I could have killed Mr. Mirrikh that day, I felt so furious about it; but to kill your fox you must first find it, and I had never seen the man from that time till now.

Nor had Maurice. Yet it seemed to make no difference.

"George, I shall give up my position and am going to Thibet," he said to me that morning, after we had told the Doctor all. And he did it—strange as it may seem, he did it.

"You are going with me," he kept on declaring.

He need not have doubted that, if he were mad enough to go himself.

Briefly, we went. I, because I loved Maurice, and the Rev. Miles Philpot went because he wanted to—because he had nowhere else to go.

Maurice was mad. I believed it fully, and I blamed Mirrikh and his hypnotic powers for the whole affair.

What had been told my friend after Mirrikh had hypnotized me, Maurice would not divulge, nor did I ever fully ascertain. All I know is that Mirrikh gave him a letter of introduction to Mr. Radma Gungeet, at Benares, and from this individual Maurice received a document written in several sets of characters, which proved the very open sesame for us into that hitherto inpenetrable land—Thibet.

All we had to do was to show this to the local Buddhist priest, and lo! difficulties vanished like magic.

Now it was quite useless to attempt to turn Maurice a hair's breadth.

Whatever was said to him, it had transformed Maurice De Veber into another individual.

For myself I had nobody but Maurice now, and I would have died sooner than desert him. As for the Rev. Miles

Philpot, he would have travelled to Siberia with us so long as the brandy and tobacco held out.

Thus we found ourselves at the inn near Zhad-uan, on the northern slope of the Himalayas, a spot on God's footstool where never Caucasian, certainly never American, trod before.

There we were, three travelers in Thibet. We had taken possession of the inn and hoped to keep it.

Fancy then our disappointment, when coming up the rocky ascent under the light of those glittering stars, I beheld a caravan, consisting of three camels and their riders, together with a sort of palanquin, borne on the shoulders of four men.

"By Jove! its coming here!" groaned the Doctor. "We shall have to share the k'ang with all that crowd."

"Dey f'lom Lh'asa!" exclaimed Ah Schow, who had flung down the argols and was standing at our side. "Me tink dey come f'lom Trashilunpo too."

"How do you tell, Ah Schow?" asked Maurice.

"Dat bed come f'lom Calcutta, boss. Me know!"

Now this same Ah Schow was a wonderful man in his way, I want you to understand. He had lived in Lh'asa, he told us; at all events we were amazed when we learned that to his other accomplishments the fellow added a knowledge of the Thibetan tongue, which seemed to bear out his claim. He was with us for many weeks and through many trials. The only objection I ever found to him was that having once run a wash house on Stockton street, San Francisco, he would call whichever one of us he was addressing, "boss."

Meanwhile the caravan was steadily approaching and the shrill "sok! sok!" of the camel drivers sounded as if spoken at our very feet, the atmosphere was so wonderfully clear.

The camels came first, loaded with boxes and bales hung about their ungainly hips until it was difficult to tell where the camel ended and the luggage began. Then followed the palanquin and in the rear we could just catch a glimpse of several men mounted on mules coming up the pass.

We could not see the faces of the riders, however, and the light was too uncertain to enable us to tell by their costumes whether they were Thibetans, or Chinese traders from Bootan or Napaul.

To us they looked like so many sheep walking on their

hind legs, which is not at all strange when you come to consider that they all wore huge sheepskin coats and caps with the wool turned out.

"Come! come! We must attend to the fire!" cried Maurice suddenly. "Poor wretches! They will be fairly frozen by the time they get here. Hurry, Ah Schow, and put more argols under the k'ang."

Now the k'ang in a Thibetan or Tartar inn, is of such huge import that I must stop to tell what it is like.

Inns, in the Thibetan mountains, let it be understood, are for the most part mere shelters, maintained for the accomodation of travellers, who are expected to provide for themselves. Indeed the traveller may consider it luck even to find a shelter; he must expect nothing else, or certain disappointment awaits him. Does he want the tsamba, or barley meal, which forms the staple of diet all over these regions? If he does, and he has failed to provide himself with it beforehand, then he will be pretty apt to fare badly, for money here goes for nothing. Even if the inn is in charge of the family whose business it is to keep it clean, they will have nothing to sell, but rather will try to buy from you.

Tsamba, vermicelli, or rice, is the kind of diet to which your Thibetan traveller has to accustom himself. He must take his water cask with him; also a copper kettle, a bellows, a ladle, and a pillow, if he wants one; besides these things there are the horses or camels to be looked out for. But all this is not telling about the k'ang.

Picture to yourself four mud walls with the binding straw sticking out all over them in spots; thatch overhead, perhaps, or likely enough more mud, plastered over criss-crossed sticks, with mud pounded hard for the floor.

Such is the average inn interior, all except the k'ang, which is nothing more or less than a broad bench of planks built up against one wall, closed in front with the exception of a small opening to thrust the argols through, and numerous holes to let out the heat. Sometimes this opening is in the outside wall, and to build your fire inside you have to go out of doors.

Usually the k'ang stands about four feet high and takes up three-quarters of the room. Sometimes mats are thrown over it, or bits of carpet, if you have them. In the larger inns, in more populous districts where there are "all modern

improvements," you will find in front of the k'ang huge caldrons for cooking soup, their legs bedded in the mud with places for fires underneath, so arranged that the smoke and surplus heat passes under the k'ang and thence by the smoke hole to the outer air.

When the fire is built under the k'ang, the planks above are soon heated and will remain reasonably warm for quite a length of time. Here you sit by day and sleep by night, and if you can accustom yourself to roasting on one side and freezing on the other, you will soon learn, as we did, to make yourself very comfortable on the k'ang.

Bent upon his benevolent intentions, Maurice now lent his assistance to Ah Schow and the argols were soon gathered up and thrown under the k'ang. Meanwhile I had shut the door and the Doctor returned to his comfortable position in the warmest corner.

"May as well secure a seat while it's possible," he said. "Just you wait till these people come up and then see how comfortable we'll be? I tell you there's no such thing as sleep to-night."

They were coming. The shouts of the camel drivers grew louder. Anxious to keep the place as warm as possible, we refrained from opening the door again, until the racket outside told us that the moment had arrived.

"Here they are!" cried Manrice. "Let's do the hospitable, George. We would expect it if we were in their place."

"Keep the door shut whatever else you do!" roared the Doctor. "As for me I don't budge an inch for the biggest Lama in Thibet."

Before we could answer, the door was flung open and in walked one of the K'ambas, or "red-capped men," as the Chinese call the natives of eastern Thibet.

He was short and thick set, dressed in a dirty sheepskin, cut *a la robe de nuit*, very bunchy and reaching about to his knees, where it was met by high boot legs of red cloth with thick rawhide soles. He wore nothing on his head, nor did he seem to need it, for his long, tangled hair formed a jet black mat of amazing thickness, falling down over his shoulders and "banged" across the forehead, just above the eyes.

"Peace be with you, my brothers!" he exclaimed—Ah Schow was equal to the translation—"we have brought a guest who will be sure not to crowd you off the k'ang."

We bowed in as near Oriental fashion as we knew how. Maurice, through Ah Schow, assuring "our elder brother," that on the k'ang was room enough for all.

Now, to our surprise, the fellow, instead of being followed up by his companions who were crowding about the open door, retreated, and presently we saw the covered litter, palanquin, or whatever you may please to call it, brought up.

Meanwhile Maurice and I had gone out, and found ourselves facing a staring crowd of fierce looking fellows of which the man I have just described was a fair type.

Evidently they were puzzled to make us out, in spite of the fact that we were dressed in the costume of the Thibetan lamas, wearing the long black cloaks, Chinese trousers and shoes; our appearance was correct except for our hair, which we had cut as short as possible without shaving, something we ought to have done to make the illusion complete. This I ought to have mentioned before, and that I have not done so is an oversight. Of course any one who has ever read a line about Thibet knows how utterly impossible it would be for us to gain admittance to the country in any other dress.

Grouped behind their drivers were the camels, whose mournful cries had aroused our mules in the little stable back of the inn, and they were by no means slow to make their voices heard. Every camel, besides the tremendous load each carried, was hung with bells innumerable and these clanged and jangled with each movement, producing an effect truly Wagnerian; in fact between the bells and the ceaseless chatter of the drivers, even had we been perfect artists in Thibetan, it would have been quite impossible to have made ourselves heard.

"Find out who these people are and what they are going to do," Maurice said to Ah Schow. "If they've got some great man in that travelling house, find out who he is so that we may do the honors of the inn in proper shape."

This started Ah Schow off to mingle with the crowd, but before he returned with the desired information, the mystery had in part solved itself.

Six long-haired men were crowding around the litter as soon as the bearers let it down.

It was a simple affair—just a sort of hand barrow with four upright poles over which rush mats were thrown.

"Thunder and Mars! Why don't the fellow get out?"

exclaimed Maurice. "One would think it was the Grand Lama himself from all the fuss that's being made."

"Perhaps he's frozen," I suggested, cheerfully.

"Shouldn't wonder! It must be frightful to ride in this temperature in an arrangement like that. Look, George! Look! Why they are taking him out by the heels. It's just as you say, he must be frozen. Merciful heaven! That is what the fellow meant by a guest who would not crowd us off the k'ang. They are bringing us a corpse!"

We pushed forward, elbowed by the camel drivers who seemed just as curious as ourselves.

Between them the six men who had pressed around the litter were carrying a human form, so enveloped in sheepskins that we could not tell at first whether it was man or woman. Only the face was exposed and as yet we were not near enough to see that.

Slowly they walked toward the inn door, the camel drivers moving aside as they advanced.

"Now is our chance for a look, George!" whispered Maurice, as they came past the spot where we had stationed ourselves. "Tell you what, old fellow, if we are to be housed up for the rest of the night with a dead man and a gang like this, I'm for taking to the road again, unless—great God! Look there!"

"What?"

"The corpse—the face!"

"I can't see the face; it is covered with a cloth!"

"No, no! Not all covered! Look! Look!"

I leaned forward, for now the long haired bearers were in the act of passing us.

Had I been blind that I had not seen before—that I had not guessed?

The corpse was that of a man, the face was one which I, least of all men in the world should ever forget.

"Oh, Maurice!"

I could say no more, for the face seen among the sheepskins was the face of our Mr. Mirrikh, the man from the planet Mars.

CHAPTER X.

RESURGAM.

THEY were gone.

The last camel had departed, the tail of the hindmost mule had vanished over the rocky ridge, a hundred feet or so above the inn, which formed the apex of the mountain pass, Zhad-uan; the shrill "sok! sok!" of the K'ambas was heard no more.

Inside the inn Maurice, Dr. Philpot, and your humble servant stood leaning against the k'ang, contemplating the lifeless body of Mr. Mirrikh, which, still enveloped in its sheepskin covering, lay upon its side at our feet.

Thus we had been standing for a good ten minutes; thus Ah Schow found us still standing when he returned from the stable after feeding the mules with barley, begged almost for its weight in Chinese sapeks from one of the camel drivers of the caravan, for we had seen the last of our own supply. Thus, perhaps, we might have kept right on standing and staring for the rest of the night, but for the Doctor's habit of rising to the situation, no matter how bad it might be.

"Blow me, boys, if this isn't the rum go, you know!" he exclaimed at last." "You could have knocked me over with a feather, Maurice, when you came in singing out that Mirrikh was dead."

"It's a serious business, Doctor! A serious business," replied Maurice gloomily. "You must admit it's pretty hard on a fellow to have all his plans knocked in the head."

"Best thing that ever happened you," I said decidedly.

"Same here!" added the Doctor. "Thank God we'll see the last of this crazy business now, and start back for Calcutta before we become corpses ourselves."

But Maurice never answered. Instead, he gave me one of his reproachful looks which always had the effect of turning me to his side.

"Philpot, are we going to inquire into the business or take it for granted that he is dead?" I demanded.

"Why of course he is dead."

"Ah Schow says he couldn't make out what was supposed to be the matter. That human sheep who first broke in on us, just said the body had been given them by some lamas in Bootan, with orders to leave it at this inn."

Now this was all we could make out of Ah Schow's version of the affair, and we had no doubt he told us all that had been told to him.

Strangely enough, it seemed to us, after the body had been brought in, not one of the caravan people would enter the place.

The lamas of Bootan had told them to leave the corpse here, and here they proposed to leave it. Beyond that they had nothing to say.

And it seemed very, very strange to me then, that their arrival should have been so nicely timed as to find us at the inn ready to receive the body. It was, however, to be least among innumerable strange happenings present in my thoughts, before many days had passed.

Now they were all gone and we were alone with our dead; for if not ours, whose was it, I should like to know?

Positively it almost seemed as though Mr. Mirrikh meant to give us another of his surprises; as though the whole matter had been pre-arranged.

"Look here, boys, we'll soon settle the question!" exclaimed Philpot, after we had indulged in some further discussion. "Let's pull off some of these coverings and see what our Martial friend is made of. It won't take me two seconds to tell if he has passed in his checks or not."

There could be no objection to this idea. Nothing could be more important than to have the question settled once and for all.

We all lent our aid and removed the sheepskin without much difficulty, despite of the fact that it had been securely sewed round the body.

Yes, it was Mirrikh. Not in the dress in which we had last seen him, but, like ourselves, attired as a Thibetan lama, with shaven head, black cloak and all. You may be very sure the Doctor pulled aside the shirt to see if the strange discoloration extended down upon the breast and shoulders,

but it did not. Below the neck Mr. Mirrikh's body was almost as white as my own.

Of course the face had been carefully examined first of all. It was half covered with the black cloth mask, just as he liked to keep it, and so cold that at first the Doctor declared that the flesh was frozen, then in a minute changing round and being just as positive that it was not; and we all fell to wondering why it was not, and I can only add that I am wondering still.

Now Philpot's medical skill came in play beautifully.

"He's as dead as a smelt," he exclaimed, after a most careful examination. "There ain't the slightest doubt about it. What can it mean?"

"Can you distinguish no heart action?" asked Maurice gloomily.

"Not a murmur! Try for yourself."

Maurice bent over the bared breast and remained with his ear down for fully five minutes, during which time the Doctor was holding his pocket mirror to the lips, trying at the same time to find the pulse, although he had done all this before.

Dead!

Such was the final verdict.

My friend Mirrikh lay a corpse; thrown at our feet, as one might say, in derision of our stupendous folly.

Could we hope to play Hamlet without Hamlet?

Decidedly this was the last act in the drama, just as the Doctor had said. At least that is what I thought when finally, sometime after midnight, I stretched myself out upon the k'ang to try and obtain a little sleep before morning came; for, after a long discussion, we had decided to turn our mules' noses back in the direction of Bootan with the rising of to-morrow's sun.

Maurice was asleep already. He had dropped off just as soon as he lay down—something very unusual for him.

Ditto the Doctor; but he always kept one eye open, was continually rousing up, putting a pinch of tobacco into his pipe and puffing vigorously, until the next one knew, with the pipe within easy reach of his hand he would be snoring again.

Ah Schow was asleep too, but then the faithful Celestial never lost an opportunity for slumber.

Why could not I sleep like the rest?

Why must I lie there as the weary moments dragged by, tossing uneasily upon the k'ang?

Not that I expected to sleep when I lay down; on the contrary, what surprised me was the way the Doctor and Maurice went off and the soundness with which they were sleeping now.

Then I fell to dreaming—waking dreams I mean, for I am ready to make a solemn affidavit that I never closed my eyes that night.

I must talk about these dreams for a moment. I can remember each thought of the many which flitted through my brain, with a distinctness so vivid that it sometimes seems as though some occult influence had photographed them upon the page of memory. I had little belief in the occult then—it is different now.

It appeared to me somehow as if the room was filled with shadow forms—phantoms, if you will—certainly not seen with my natural eyes; yet see them I most assuredly did.

How?

God knows! Let those who can fathom the mysteries of the super-sense explain.

I only tell what happened, I am simply a recorder, and I write my record truly. Make what you like out of it—explain it in whatever way suits you best.

Dreams, dreams, and yet surely it was not all a dream.

I was standing near on the k'ang listening to Maurice's steady breathing and the Doctor's occasional snorts, when all at once I saw a form in white flit past me and approach the corpse.

Was I startled?

No! I declare solemnly I was not; and when I tried to move and found that a power over which I had no control held me down, I never made another effort. I could not disturb myself—I tried it and failed; a strange calmness seemed to have taken possession of my soul.

Not like the shadows I had been seeing was this. Oh, no! It was something altogether of a different sort.

It was the form of a woman of tall, stately figure. Her dress was marvellous in its whiteness—"shining exceeding white as snow so as no fuller on earth can white them," I found myself involuntarily murmuring, quoting from that sacred book which I had ever regarded with contempt.

Over her head a veil of some filmy material was thrown which practically hid her features. She raised her hands and threw the veil toward me as she glided past—I felt its touch upon my face—it was real!

"Maurice! I must wake Maurice!" flashed over me. "I must know whether these are dreams or not!"

Useless! If a mountain had stood there ready to fall and crush me, I could neither have moved nor spoken a word.

With a quick, gliding motion the veiled woman now approached the body of Mr. Mirrikh, and bending down began making passes over the face, exactly as I have since seen a hypnotizer work upon his subject.

I watched her. Never for an instant were my eyes removed from her. She was wondrously beautiful—divine!

Moment succeeded moment. Still the veiled woman was there—still those slender, snow white hands moved to and fro over the face of the corpse.

Presently a strange thing occurred—so strange that it were better omitted, were it not that I have sworn to keep nothing back.

Now as I watched the veiled form, I perceived that it was growing smaller—growing thin and vapory, just as I had seen Mr. Mirrikh turn into vapor in the alley, at Panompin, on that ever memorable night.

Then, all in an instant, the hands ceased to move and the form sank down upon the floor, an unmeaning mass of white drapery, which for a second seemed to glow with singular phosphorescence, and then——

Presto!

It was gone!

The veiled woman was no longer there!

Terror now seized me. I tried again to move—to reach Maurice and awaken him, but a power incomprehensible still held me down.

I was conscious, yet helpless. My soul was keenly alive to everything, but the power of controlling the body it inhabited seemed to have been taken away.

There was just one thing I could do and that was to keep my eyes fixed upon the particular spot on the floor where the vapory form had vanished.

Soon I beheld a round phosphorescent spot of light, which seemed to exactly fill the space upon which my vision was concentrated and no more.

Slowly it increased in size, until it was as big, perhaps, as a large cocoanut and of about the same shape.

Now it changed—changed so suddenly that I neither saw nor knew how the change came.

A human head was there—it was the head of a man—it was the head of Mr. Mirrikh—the face was partly yellow—partly black!

Eyes, nose, mouth—every feature was perfect, yet there was nothing but the head resting on the floor.

Suddenly the eyes turned toward me and fixed themselves on my own. Then I saw the lips move, and as distinctly as I ever heard human lips utter sounds, I heard him say:

"Mr. Wylde, I greet you! This is the way we come up!"

Did I answer?

Never!

To save me from death I could not have spoken.

I saw the head rise—saw bust and shoulders form from filmy vapor. Next, he was there on his hands and knees, and then with a sudden spring he leaped to his feet and stood beside his own corpse—a man!

"Turn your head the other way, Mr. Wylde. You have seen all that is best for you to see," he said in that calm way which I remembered so well.

Now I was as powerless to remain without motion as before I had been powerless to move—my head seemed to turn of its own accord.

"Wylde! Wylde! Wake up! Wake up, man!"

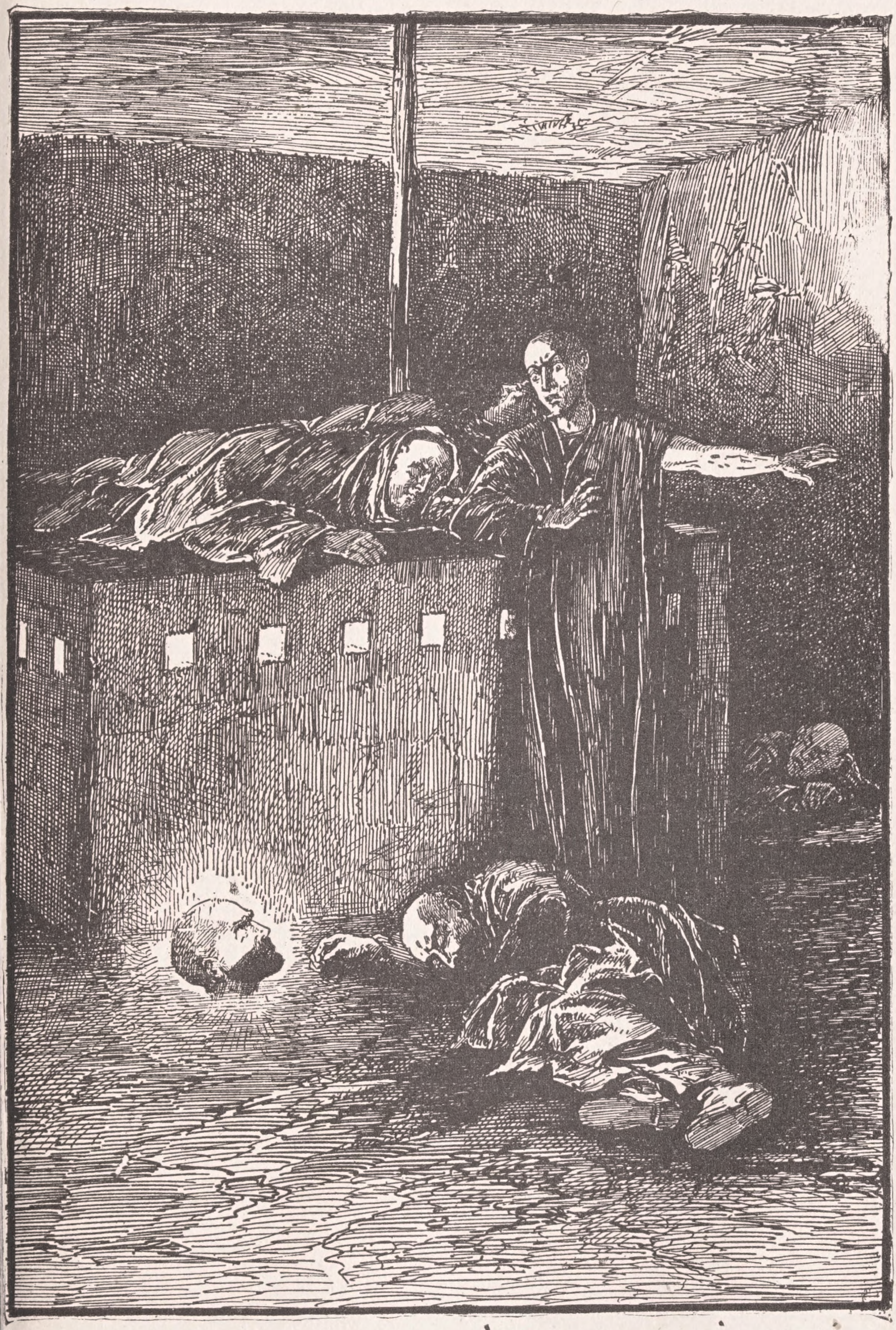
Merciful God, had I been asleep? Was it a dream again? Do not ask me, for I do not know!

All I can say is that I sprang from the k'ang my own master, and found myself facing that man of mystery, weighed down by a sense of awe.

It was Mirrikh—Mirrikh in the flesh—Mirrikh alive—the same Mirrikh who had talked with us in the tower.

I turned my eyes, seeking the corpse.

It had disappeared.



CHAPTER XI.

ON THE ROAD TO PSAM–DAGONG.

I SAID nothing about it to the Doctor, but I told Maurice all.

I was almost sorry that Mirrikh had not stayed in his sheepskins, that the caravan had not made a miss of it and dropped him somewhere else, for the next day found us mounted upon our mules plodding over the mountains, with their noses pointing toward Lh'asa instead of Bootan.

Words cannot express the utter amazement of Philpot and Maurice when they awakened to find my friend Mr. Mirrikh alive and seated comfortably on the k'ang by my side.

"Gad! No! I say, no! It can't be!"

The Doctor was first to wake.

"What is the matter?" Mr. Mirrikh asked with his accustomed calmness.

"The matter! Great heavens, he wants to know the matter! Why man, you are dead! If you ain't you ought to be, or I'm in the first stages of softening of the brain."

But Maurice was different.

Perhaps he was only half awake, though, at the time. It was after Ah Schow, who had been awakened by the Doctor's racket, gave one yell of terror at the sight of our guest and went flying out of doors. Ah Schow, be it understood, was a firm believer in ghosts, and of course he took Mr. Mirrikh for one. Indeed, I was not quite certain on the subject myself!

I can see that dear boy now, just as he looked when he started up. His eyes rested on the Doctor first, then they passed to my adept.

"Mr. Mirrikh!"

"Yes."

"Not dead?"

"I am here, my friend. I have kept my appointment!"

"I knew it! Doctor, I told you so! I knew he would not fail us!"

He was wild in his enthusiasm—mad.

Then the Doctor!

I fancy I see him now, fumbling unsteadily in his tobacco pouch with that stub of a pipe he always smoked, his eyes fixed upon Mr. Mirrikh, to whom Maurice was pouring out words in the way he used to do, which I had tried in vain to make him do of late.

"I say, look here; give a fellow a show, will you, De Veber? Do you find it more convenient, Mr. Mirrikh, in traveling in this blasted country to freeze yourself like a side of beef and be forwarded by fast camel express?"

Mr. Mirrikh laughed shortly.

"Now, Doctor; now, Doctor! he exclaimed. "You are not sorry to see me alive, I trust?"

"I have nothing to say about that one way or the other," replied the Doctor in his most positive fashion. What I say is this—and I stick to it—when I examined you last night you were dead."

Again the adept gave his peculiar laugh.

"This is a strange country, Doctor," he said lightly. "The strangest part of it is to see a dead man get hungry. I am most horribly hungry just now, so let us postpone further discussion till after breakfast, if it is all the same to you."

But the discussion was not renewed.

The Doctor seemed to feel that he had made a blunder which would lower him in our estimation as a general "knowledgist," and showed a disposition to drop the matter. As for myself, I maintained profound silence; not only on the subject of this marvellous resurrection, but likewise on all that Mr. Mirrikh told me after it took place.

Not that this amounted to much, I was full of amazement when he seized my hand and said warningly :

"Now Mr. Wylde, you have been brought face to face with a mystery which it has been the good fortune of but few of you earth dwellers to see. Be careful! No casting pearls before swine! I was determined to give you this satisfaction and I have done it; but such mysteries are not for all."

It took me many minutes to collect myself, but I caught the spirit of his warning words, and was ready for him at last.

"What have you done? What does it all mean?" I demanded. "Who gave you the power to transcend the laws

of Nature, to conquer death, to make yourself as a God?"

"You are wrong at the very outset," he replied. "There is but one God, our Father Eternal in the heavens, and did you but acknowledge Him, you would be a happier man. Neither I nor any of His creatures can transcend the laws which He has ordained from the beginning; some understand them better than others—that is all."

"You were not dead then?"

"No. Of course not. God alone has power over life and death."

"But ——"

"Stay; do you know anything of the philosophy of the Buddhist adepts?"

"Very little."

"Then to try to explain what you have seen is hopeless. To comprehend these things the mind needs long and careful training. Believe me when I say that this is but a tithe of the mysteries which I will reveal to you before we finally part."

"Would that we might part now and forever—that your spell was removed from that dear boy," I replied, bitterly.

"Do not say so. He has his work to do, you have yours."

"Would that we had never met."

"We were destined to meet. God willed it."

"At least I was powerless to prevent it; but I earnestly beseech you to release my friend from the glamour you have cast over him, and go your own way."

"No; I cannot. It is not to be."

"It should be so if I could make it so."

"That you cannot do!"

"I know it. I have tried."

"And failed."

"Hopelessly failed."

And yet you do not seem to feel as hardly toward me as I should expect."

"I have tried to do so, but even there I fail, and I do not know why I should, unless it is that you have cast some portion of your spell over me."

He laughed softly.

"My dear sir, to hear you talk, one would think I was some cheap magician. I could no more cast a spell over you than you could cast one over me."

"I am assured to the the contrary. The experience of the last hour proves to the contrary."

"You do not believe that you saw what you actually did see?"

"No. I refuse to believe it. I utterly reject it."

"Do you *know* the full meaning of what you saw?"

"Yes."

"You do not."

"I beg your pardon, I do."

"I repeat, you do not. Mr. Wylde, let me tell you something. It will surprise you when I inform you that one hour ago I was in Benares in the private apartments of my friend, Radma Gungeet, whom I understand you have met since I was with you last."

"That I know to be false."

"On the contrary, you know nothing about it; moreover it is true."

"But your body ——"

Bah! What is this earthly body? I speak of my astral body, which envelopes the soul, my real self. I am no more bound to this body than you are to the black gown you wear at the present moment, which, by the way, becomes you immensely. Why, I have not been with this body before for months. I dreaded the journey to this place and sent my body on ahead—that is all."

"And it is quite enough!" I cried angrily. "I will hear no more of it. You have deluded me in some way. I am at a loss to tell how, but listen to your theosophic rubbish any longer, I won't."

He sighed, and turned away muttering:

"Useless, useless! They cannot understand. Will the time never come?"

This ended our conversation, for just then the Doctor woke up and the fun began.

Morning dawned—another day was upon us; after a long and heated discussion we were on the move again.

Not that Mr. Mirrikh joined in the argument. He said nothing, but walked out into the open as soon as I began it, remaining there until it was over.

The discussion was between Maurice, the Doctor and myself.

"It is no use, George; let that man be what he may, I shall go on," Maurice had said. "He has made certain promises to me, set up certain claims. So far he has kept his promises and established his claims, and I propose to stick

to him. You, if you like, can return to India. Please yourself."

"I shall never return without you, Maurice," I replied. "The future has nothing in store for me. Where you go, I go. At least I shall have the satisfaction of being at your side when the day of disaster comes, as come it surely will."

He pressed my hand with unusual warmth, and that was the last of our discussion.

Soon Ah Schow brought the mules around to the door and we started down the mountain.

As there were only three mules, Mr. Mirrikh rode double with Maurice as far as the town of Zhad-uan, where a fourth was purchased, after which it was easier travelling, though it was all hard enough.

A hundred miles lay before us, Mr. Mirrikh said, and we took it for granted that he knew.

Now as I had been contemplating writing a detailed account of the manners and customs of this unknown land, I was not a little disappointed to learn that our way for the entire distance lay through an utterly desolate country; little less, in fact, than an endless series of broken mountain chains, sandy deserts and barren plains.

Zhad-uan was the frontier town of the region, and after a short stay we were on the road again.

Now from the moment we left the inn, Mr. Mirrikh conducted himself in every way like a human being—whether or not he was one, I had begun to feel grave doubts.

My philosophy was completely shattered, and even the Doctor was silent on the subject.

To the outward observer we were simply four black lamas travelling with their servant. To ourselves we were a mystery—all except the Doctor, and I honestly believe that in spite of his protests he was glad of the decision to advance. I will do the man the justice to say that the advice he had offered to the contrary was expressed solely for our good.

We had with us everything needed to make us as comfortable as circumstances would permit; tent, cooking utensils, canned meats and vegetables. No one interfered with us, and I came to the conclusion that no one would to the end.

Not that we passed unchallenged.

At Zhad-uan, for instance, we were stopped and hurried before the Chinese governor of the town.

I thought that Mr. Mirrikh would take the initiative and suggested it.

"Show your passport," he said. "Nothing else is necessary."

I exhibited the paper to a fat mandarin with a tremendously long moustache, who sat before us on a bamboo chair, eating watermelon seeds and listening sleepily to his assistant who was interrogating Ah Schow.

It resulted just as usual. We had been through the same scene many times before, until now it had grown quite familiar.

The mandarin put on a pair of huge horn spectacles and glanced at the mysterious paper; his face giving no expression of his thoughts as he folded it up and handed it back.

"Peace be with you my lords lamas!" he said. "The way lies open before you—pass on."

Easier said than done, for there are few countries on the face of the globe more difficult to travel in than eastern Thibet.

We were two days at Zhad-uan, staying at the hotel of *Faith and Perseverance*—so its name, translated, reads.

It required more faith than I possessed to make a hotel out of it, but there was a place for us to lie down and sleep, and that was about all we had looked for. Of course we had to cook for ourselves.

Down here in the valley the weather was warm and comfortable, but all around us we could see rising the snow capped peaks of the northern Himalayas, so we knew what we had to expect.

We started at daylight, presenting quite an imposing appearance as we rode through the crooked streets out of town.

Men stared, women and children crowded to the doors of the low, smoke begrimed houses; not a few beseeched our prayers as we passed, for Ah Schow, the rascal, had given it out that we were lamas whose prayers were most powerful, especially in healing the sick.

In fact we were often called upon to pray by these people and for that purpose each of us carried a copper prayer wheel which we ground industriously when occasion required, always winding up with the assurance that Buddha had heard and would grant the request.

All that day over the plain, resting at night in our own tent at the foot of the loftiest mountain I had yet seen.

Morning found us ascending the foot hills, and by noon we reached the beginning of a pass between two snowy peaks, the bed of some ancient river certainly, where huge boulders and masses of broken rock lay heaped in inexplicable confusion with a narrow trail winding in and out.

This was our road, according to Mr. Mirrikh—we were trusting entirely to his guidance now.

"Seems to me it would have paid you better to have made one jump from Benares to Psam-dagong," I said in a sarcastic moment.

"And left you to struggle with all these dangers alone?" he replied. "You do not do me half justice, Mr. Wylde."

"Do you mean to say that you knew you would meet us at the inn?"

"Most certainly I did."

"And your body?"

"Was delivered there by my orders, of course."

"Upon my word you timed it well then."

"Such was my intention."

"How did you manage?"

"No matter now. The Doctor is trying to overtake us, We will talk of this some other time."

Maurice's mule was decidedly the best, and, as usual, had gone ahead. Mr. Mirrikh and I followed, while the Doctor and our Celestial *cuisiniere* had fallen behind.

"Do you know, Wylde, we are running head first into a snow storm?" called the former as he spurred up the slope. "What do you think about it Mr. Mirrikh? Am I not right?"

The adept surveyed the clouds, which for some time had been gathering.

"There certainly is a storm approaching," he said at length. "I have been blind not to notice it before."

"I saw it half an hour back," said the Doctor, proudly, "and I've been trying ever since to force this lazy brute along so as to overtake you. Is Maurice far ahead?"

I pointed upward. There, fully two hundred feet above us, was Maurice mounted on his mule, moving at a snail's pace it seemed, but it was rapid compared with our own.

"We ought to warn him. What are we to do, Mr. Mirrikh?"

"Do the best we can. There is a guard house at the summit of the pass—we can spend the night there."

"Yes, and be most deucedly uncomfortable till morning. You say there is no town between this and your lamasery?"

"None."

"Of course you know?"

"I should know. I have passed this way before."

"Seems to me," said the Doctor, in his most sarcastic manner, "that when I get ready to drop down on Jupiter, I'll take devilish good care to select a better place to fall in than Thibet."

"You will find no such place on the planet Jupiter as Thibet;" replied the adept, calmly.

"Oh, dear! Is that so? Of course you know."

"I have been there."

"I find no more difficulty in believing that assertion than some others you have made."

"That I come from Mars for instance?"

"For instance!"

"Jupiter," continued Mr. Mirrikh, paying no attention to the Doctor's offensive manner, "is now passing through a geologic age corresponding with the earth's Tertiary period. There it is all summer, all—I beg your pardon, Mr. Wylde. For once I forgot myself. You do not like to hear me talk of these matters. I will stop."

"Go on, if you wish," I replied. "I have nothing to say, except that you must not expect me to believe you."

"Oh, don't stop! Don't stop!" said the Doctor. "I'm deeply interested. No doubt you've been to Mercury and Saturn as well as old Jove; like as not a comet or two has been honored by your presence. It will be worth all this mad journey has cost friend George, to have your personal experiences on the other side of the moon!"

And so it went all through the first part of the time we travelled with Mr. Mirrikh; yet I never saw the man out of temper or even ruffled once.

Usually he and Maurice kept together, the Doctor and I being left to keep each other company as best we could.

Long and earnest were the conversations those two held. What were they talking about? I never knew—do not know now.

The Doctor was right about the snow storm.

That night saw us imprisoned in the guard house at the

top of the pass with a perfect blizzard in full operation outside.

Of course if I was writing a book of travels in Thibet it would be scarcely *en regle* to shift my scenes thus abruptly; but this is not a book of travel, and although my notes are fairly bursting with incidents, I am trying in my feeble way to treat of the occult, and to the occult my story must be confined.

I ought, however, to say a descriptive word about these guard houses, which, like the inns already described, are found all over Eastern Thibet. Although actually a Chinese institution, and supposed to be kept in repair by the government—they are intended to be on all the great roads at a distance of two miles apart—it is only once in awhile you meet one in shape to afford even shelter from a shower, and that is why the Thibetans, who know by sad experience what it is to depend upon the Chinese government for anything, have established the inns and try to make them what the guard houses should be but are not.

The guard house we had come upon was, however, one of the best of its class. Picture to your mind a square, box-like structure, about twenty feet each way, one story in height, built of mud and whitewashed. There was a large door in front and two rooms within, opening off each side of the hall which was supposed to accommodate our mules, and I must confess did, and very comfortably too. The rooms were small and each had its window and k'ang, while in addition was a wooden bench running around the walls and painted bright red with Thibetan characters cut in the wood, meaning, according to Mr. Mirrikh, "the sublime ruler of the Flowery Kingdom, trusted sincerely that his elder brother might enjoy a comfortable night's rest."

Outside, the walls were decorated with rude paintings, dragons, horsemen and grinning gods with huge moustaches being scattered freely over the whitewash; on the walls within were pictorial representations of sabres, bows, arrows and spears, supposed to take the place of armed soldiers to defend the traveller from the robbers with which all Thibet is infested, though, strangely enough, we never encountered them once.

"By Jove, quite Chinese, you know!" exclaimed the Doctor, when he saw these pictured weapons. "They are to scare the robbers off!"

Such was actually their purpose; but the only purpose they served that night was to amuse Maurice, who spent a good hour studying them while dreaming over his pipe.

This was after we were comfortably housed and supper eaten. Meanwhile the storm, of which we had already had a taste, being in it half an hour before we reached the guard house, was raging furiously outside.

The Doctor as usual, had laid down to sleep on the most comfortable part of the k'ang, Mirrikh was seated cross-legged facing him, busy writing in that same little book about which I had made such a stir in the old tower at Ballambong. I was pacing the floor lost in thought apparently, but actually watching the man as he wrote. I had watched him before and more than once I questioned him about those strange characters and the language they represented, but I never succeded in getting any information worth recording here.

"It is my native language," he replied, the first time I asked him. "You cannot understand it, Mr. Wylde."

"Learned on Mars?" was my incredulous query.

He assured me that it was so, and probably my manner of receiving the statement was what prevented me from getting further particulars. Often since I have wished that I had acted differently and learned something definite about the matter; but I neglected my opportunity and can only add that upon another occasion he told me the characters were entirely arbitrary and in no sense an alphabet, being rather stenographic—each expressing a word, several words, a thought.

How the wind howled! I can hear it now! Nor was it any wonder, when you stop to consider that we were, as I learned later, over 11,000 feet above sea level; fortunately we were under the shelter of a lofty peak which towered far above us on the northwest, and what was more to the point, a perpendicular wall of rock at least one hundred feet high rose directly behind the guard house—the location had been chosen, no doubt, for that very cause.

Cold? Well, make no mistake on that score! The k'ang was almost useless to one three feet away. I had sent Ah Schow out to throw an extra sheepskin over my mule who was far from being in condition, poor brute, and was just wondering why he did not come in again, when all at once Mr. Mirrikh leaped from the k'ang with a startled cry.

"Merciful heavens!" he exclaimed, "this is terrible!"

"What?" cried Maurice, turning suddenly around.

"Got a fit, Mirrikh?" asked the Dortor, lazily, never stirring from his comfortable roost on the k'ang.

For the moment the adept did not answer, but just stood there with his eyes fixed on nothingness, an expression of unmistakable horror mingled with deep pity plainly pictured upon his face.

"What is it? What is the matter? Speak," persisted Maurice.

He sighed and raised his head slowly. Then up came one hand which was brushed before his eyes.

"Gentlemen," he said, with more agitation than I ever afterward saw him display, "we are needed outside. There is human life in peril; if there is yet time I propose to save it; who will go?"

"Go where? What can you mean?" I exclaimed.

"I mean that on a ledge a little off the road on the other slope of this ridge there is at this very moment a woman—she is freezing rapidly—she sits beside a man—I think the man is already dead, or at least dying—he is an old man—I can see his grey hair—he—ah! She calls! She calls! Come! Come! Wylde! Come Mr. De Veber—before it is too late."

He threw his cloak about him, over that drew a sheepskin coat and rushed to the door, nearly falling into the arms of Ah Schow who was just coming back from his visit to the mules.

"Out of my way!" he shouted. "Why do you block my path? De Veber are you never going to make a move?"

Maurice seized his gun and was ready, for he had not removed any of his outer wraps.

"Mad! Mad! Ye Gods! I'm buried with a lot of lunatics!" cried Philpot, "For heaven's sake don't you desert me, Wylde. I had some hope that you and I, at least, might get back to civilization again."

"I'm with Maurice," I answered hurriedly, and losing no time rushed out to face the storm.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT WE FOUND IN THE STORM.

I NEVER saw it snow as it snowed that night. I have encountered many a blizzard in the Far West, to say nothing of my experience on the Pacific Railroad, which, of course, it would be out of place to dwell upon here, and I only allude to it to show that I am not unfamiliar with blizzards. I repeat, the worst I ever saw was that night among the mountains of Eastern Thibet.

When I was outside the guard house there were Maurice and Mr. Mirrikh waiting for me amid a whirl of whitened flakes, which already covered them so completely that it was hard to tell which was skeepskin and which snow. I believe I failed to mention that we had all provided ourselves with the sheepskin coats of the country at Zhad-uan. Big clumsy things they were, too, and worn with the woolly side out. It was by advice of our adept that we purchased them —I never fully appreciated the necessity until now.

They were waiting for me and it is well they were, otherwise I might never have found them, for a camel would have been invisible five feet away from the door.

"We want a lantern!" cried Maurice. "George, you are nearest, go back and get one, like a good fellow."

"We do not need it," interposed the adept. "My powers of vision are quite sufficient. "Come! Come! We are wasting time."

"Impossible!" shouted Maurice, and even then I could scarcely hear him. "You nor no other man can see in a whirl like this."

"Friends," he answered. "I see by a vision of which you know nothing. Every moment is precious: for God's sake come!"

I had gained Mausice's side by this time, and with my mouth close to his ear begged him earnestly not to go—or at least to insist on the lantern.

Somewhat to my surprise he listened to the latter part of my proposition, though utterly rejecting the former. The

lantern was procured, all three of us returning to the guard house for that purpose. How well I remember the Doctor's vigorous protest against our mad folly when we started out the second time.

"We must keep together," said the adept, "so perhaps after all it is better with a lantern, it will be a help on that score, if no other. Give it to me. We shall have to go single file. It is not so far."

Think of the folly of it! Where were we going and why? I find myself at a loss for words to explain the feelings I experienced when we moved away from the guard house in the face of the storm, wallowing in snow already knee deep.

We had heard no cry for help, had seen nothing, knew nothing to make it appear that our mad venture had any object. We were acting entirely on the bare claim of this singular individual to a superhuman sight. Bitterly I cursed the strange influence which he had come to exercise over Maurice, but for my friend's sake I struggled on, firm in the belief that we had started on a fruitless quest.

It was useless to try and talk, for only by shouting could we make ourselves heard. The fury of the wind seemed to increase every moment. The snow whirled against our faces with blinding intensity, yet in spite of it all we started down the mountain road by the way we had come.

Mr. Mirrikh went first, Maurice followed, I, keeping as close to my friend as possible, brought up the rear.

On our left rose a wall of rock towering high above our heads; on the right yawned a precipice over the edge of which one false step might precipitate us to an awful fate. All this I had seen before darkness settled over the mountain and remembered it but too well. Ten minutes passed —it seemed as though we had been fighting the storm for hours. Raising my voice to the highest pitch, I called to Mr. Mirrikh and implored him to return.

"Courage!" he shouted back. "Courage, Mr. Wylde! It is but a few steps! Do you remember that big white boulder you examined on the way up and pronounced an evidence of glacial action—it is there."

"We can't be far from that now," cried Maurice. "It was only a few minutes before we reached the guard house after we passed it."

"We are close upon it!" he called. "Just a little more

effort, friends! Ha! What was that? Now you will believe that I told the truth!"

It was a human voice—a cry!

Faintly it fell upon our ears, but it was real.

"Coming!" shouted Mirrikh.

I remember thinking it a pity none of us understood Thibetan that we might convey some hope to this perishing soul, but the adept with all his wonderful powers assured us that he knew no more of the tongue than we did ourselves.

Of course I objected no longer, but spoke words of cheer to Maurice, who was certainly the weakest physically of the three.

I was lost in wonder at the whole strange business. How had Mirrikh known? What was the secret of this power thus to project his vision indefinitely? I thought of clairvoyance, second sight and similar things, which until then, I had considered only so many different names for humbug and chicanery. Never before had I realized how little I understood the latent powers within every man as on that memorable night.

Again the cry and again we shouted back encouraging words. It began to look as though we were going to accomplish something after all.

"Keep well up to the left!" said the adept. "The snow is gathering on the edge of the precipice—one false step and we are lost."

"It can't be a great way now," said Maurice," and I am thankful for it. Fact is, George, I'm pretty nearly used up."

Twenty paces brought us to the white boulder. We came upon it suddenly; almost before we knew it there it was rising before us amid the whirl of snow.

"Is there any one here?" shouted Mirrikh, flashing the lantern about.

Then for the first time I heard that voice which was to have such power to move me later on.

"Help! Oh help us! We are perishing!"

Though spoken with a very marked accent, the words were in our own language. It is hard to express the effect this produced on me, and I am sure with Maurice it was just the same.

"George! It is a woman! She is speaking English!" he shouted, as we pressed forward after the adept, who had already reached the rock.

It stood to the left with a space of perhaps six feet between it and the perpendicular wall against which the path was cut. A huge detached mass of white quartz, at least five feet in height and eight or ten in length, it offered some slight shelter from the storm.

There, in that narrow space, sat a young woman with a sheepskin drawn about her, bending over another sheepskin which lay at her feet, half buried in the snow. It covered a human form—a man. There was the grey head resting in her lap, and the feet projecting below that woolly covering. Still and silent it lay, and I seemed to know intuitively that all hope was idle. Truly death stalketh in the storm.

Not that my mind dwelt upon this—not that it was even remembered in the instant that followed.

As the adept's lantern was flashed behind the rock and his voice spoke words of cheer, the woman's eyes were raised and her face turned upward.

"Merciful powers!" cried Maurice; "it's that same girl we met on the road back from Ballambong!"

CHAPTER XIII.

AT PSAM-DAGONG.

"YES, it was she."

Walla Benjow was the name we came to know her by from that fearful night.

Fate had again thrown her in our path.

Now in these later days, when I have learned to believe in an all-wise protecting Providence, I feel certain it was foreordained that we should meet.

Three days passed. We were still at the guard house. At last the storm spent its fury and the sun rose upon a wondrous scene. As far as the eye could reach in every direction the whole face of the country lay buried under a covering of snow deeper than the height of an ordinary man.

Never have I viewed a grander sight. It was as though we had been raised above Nature and could look down with a calm and critical eye. Here we saw her exhibited on a

scale extended to distances bounded only by the mighty barriers of the Himalayas. All was bold and colossal; deep mountain gorges, towering peaks, awful precipices and beetling crags all rounded off and changed into a thousand fantastic shapes by the whirl of the drifting snow.

It was a sight to make a man think of his own insignificance and God's greatness, if, happily, by education or conviction he is able to comprehend what I do in some measure now, but did not then, the mighty mystery of the infinite; the loving Father who doeth all things and doeth all things well.

We stood on a rocky eminence about a hundred feet above the guard house, Dr. Philpot and I. Looking off we could see to an interminable distance on all sides, for we were at the very summit of the ridge, and our way lay down to the whitened plains below, where far, far in the distance, on the beginning of the next rise, we could faintly discern a cluster of low, square-built structures, with a gilded dome above them. This, our adept had informed us, was our destination—the lamasery of Psam-dagong.

"What a frightful country," growled the Rev. Philpot as he and I were returning from our point of observation, shortly after daylight that morning. "Do you know, Wylde, it's my humble opinion that we shall never succeed in reaching the lamasery. By Jove! I'd give something if we had Mirrikh's levitating powers and could with one jump throw ourselves back into the big courtyard of the Nagkon Wat. Summer is what I'm sighing for now."

"You don't wish it any more than I do then," I replied gloomily.

"I suppose nothing that either you or I could say would move Maurice in the least."

"Nothing. He is completely under that man's influence."

"Wholly so. His individuality seems submerged in Mirrikh. Each day only adds to it. Why, he hasn't even got eyes for that delightful creature you picked out of the snow storm, when a child could see that she is dead gone on him."

"How absurd!" I replied tartly. "The girl is all sorrow over the loss of her father. Maurice is sympathetic by nature which attracts her toward him—that is all."

He gave me a curious look—a look which set me to

wondering if he possessed some small share of the adept's powers and could read the thoughts then uppermost in my mind.

"Nothing absurd about it," he answered, digging his heel into the thick crust which now covered the snow everywhere. "I'm no fool, Wylde. No man has studied the fair sex more carefully than I have. Let me tell you a secret. The girl is in love!"

"With Maurice?"

"With Maurice."

"Don't talk ridiculous nonsense, Doctor!"

"Ta, ta! Don't you get mad, my boy, for we can't afford to quarrel. By Jove! I guess we'd better drop the subject; though, if I chose, I could add a corollory to my problem —but I won't."

I gave him a look, but he had turned his head away and was lightly humming an air from *La Grande Duchesse.*"

"You fool," I thought. "You had better take care!"

But my thought did not refer to the Doctor. On the contray, its reference was wholly to myself.

"We won't talk any more about it," I said quietly enough. "The question we are most interested in now is the crust. Is it strong enough to bear us? Are we going to start to-day or remain housed till another storm catches us."

"Here comes old double face!" exclaimed the Doctor. "He's running the whole business. Let him decide."

It was Mr. Mirrikh. As we rounded a projecting corner of the overhanging ledge, we saw him approaching. His face was bare, for he had abandoned the mask the day we left Zhad-uan, there being no particular advantage in wearing it for our benefit, and I am sure it must have been a nuisance at the best.

Had he heard?

There was no reason why he should not have heard, for he was close upon us. I gave the Doctor a nudge of warning, but too late. Still if he heard he showed it by no sign.

"Good morning, Wylde; good morning, Doctor!" he shouted. "Glorious morning, is it not? The rain last night has done the work for us. Almost never rains at this season in Thibet, so we may take it as quite a miracle. There is now nothing to hinder us from making a start."

"How long will it take us to reach the lamasery?" I inquired by way of answer.

"That depends. If the crust continues to bear the mules all the way, we can make splendid time—I should think a day and a night ought to do it."

"Camping on the snow," groaned the Doctor.

"I fear so. When I passed here before it was summer, and I remember no inn, not even a guard house, in fact, until we reached this point."

"In which case we may as well make the best of Ah Schow's breakfast," I added, for the adept had turned back with us and we were now near the door of the guard house, before which Maurice was pacing up and down, smoking his pipe on an empty stomach, as I had begged him in vain not to do at least a hundred times.

After that we all went in and sat down around the bowl of smoking *tsamba* and a few trifles of our own in the way of canned goods to help it out.

There were four of us now, besides Ah Schow, when before there had been only three.

The fourth was Walla Benjow, the girl we had taken from the storm.

And the fifth—the father?

Dead, and lying in the shallow grave, which we, with immense difficulty, had managed to dig in a sheltered spot behind the guard house wall.

I remember, and with a shudder, even now, just how he looked when we brought him in and placed him on the k'ang. His head hung down, his arms seemed glued to his sides, his face was as white as wax, and the half open eyes glassy, with little icicles hanging from his nostrils and the corners of his mouth.

But I do not think he was dead then; at least the Doctor assured us he was not, and once, I will swear, I saw his eyes roll upward and fix themselves on me with a ghastly stare.

He must have ceased to suffer though, long before that, for he was frozen stiff when we found him. Old blood flows slowly—this man's had ceased to circulate within a few minutes after we laid him on the k'ang, although we all did what we could for him; even the Doctor, roused to sympathy, exercising all his skill, which was by no means slight.

What a singular procession we must have formed when Philpot opened the door and we filed into the room.

Mr. Mirrikh, whose strength was stupendous, carried the

girl in his arms and showed no sign of fatigue, while Maurice and I were staggering with the father between us, almost winded, hardly able to get him along.

I could write pages about it all, but where would be the use? Enough has been written already to answer all practtical purposes; matters of graver import await, and I must hasten on.

We buried the father, but we saved the daughter. Saved her for what?

Merciful God! I cannot think of it without a shudder. But I anticipate and must return.

She suffered much, poor child. Her frozen limbs and hands were but the lightest of it. Her grief for her father was pitiful to see.

Did she recall us?

She did, and from the first. Some time elapsed before we could question her; there was the weeping to be over with, and hunger had to be satisfied, of course. We got to it at last.

Her's was a strange story. It ran thus:

Walla Benjow was the daughter of a tribe which inhabits the southern slope of the Kuen-lun mountains, a region far to the north of where we were, into which no European has ever set foot. As different from the Thibetans as they are from the Tartars who surround them, these people have dwelt in their mountain homes from time immemorial—even their name, which I am not going to give, is unknown to the civilized world.

At an early age this girl had been stolen from her parents and carried south, ultimately reaching Mandalay, where by a singular combination of circumstances she had fallen into the hands of an American merchant, a Mr. Julius Archer, whom I have since learned was a Philadelphian, long established in business at Mandalay.

You see I took particular pains to investigate this matter afterward and had the satisfaction of proving the entire truth of Walla's claim, which was that she had lived ten years with the Archers; at the first as nurse to their children, later as companion. Fortunately or otherwise, Madam Archer conceived a violent fancy for her, and went to considerable trouble to educate the girl, and I must admit that she succeeded admirably, for Walla could not only read and write English, but had been instructed in other branches,

and—but enough. I cannot dwell on this matter in detail. Sufficient to add that Mrs. Archer died, and Walla, at the age of eighteen, found herself adrift. What might have been her fate God alone knows, had she not one day run against her father in the bazaar!

To the girl it seemed amazing and it was so in very truth, for the distance between Mandalay and the Kuen-lun country is over a thousand miles. Yet this was a small part of the journey the old man had undertaken, travelling always on foot and alone. For years he had been a wanderer and for what? Simply that he might find his daughter, the child of his old age, and take her back with him to the mountain home where her mother lay in an untimely grave; with even that better than living mad, as she had lived from the hour her daughter disappeared.

This was all, except that Walla's heart was tender and her joy at seeing her father great.

Together they started on the long journey back to the Kuen-lun, the old man still in his character of an itinerant trader, Walla as his companion. For safety she resumed the native dress—or rather undress, and swore by her father's gods, whom I fancy she had never wholly forgotten, not to speak to any man by the way but to pass as a mute, for such in Siam and Cambodia are treated with peculiar respect.

The incident of our meeting had been brought about by an injudicious display by the old man of a handful of gold —his all.

Somehow the rough wood cutters gained the idea that he had more concealed and undertook to beat the poor girl until he should give it up. Luckily we saved her then and, as she told me afterward, she would have spoken but for fear that her father might be detained—the one thing they dreaded most.

After that they toiled on, moving steadily northward, braving a thousand perils before they reached Thibet. Furthermore we learned that the reason we had not encountered them on our road was because they had approached the mountains by way of a town to the west of Zhad-uan.

And yet, reader, if you could have seen Walla Benjow as I saw her that night in the guard house, in her Chinese dress with the dirty sheepskin wrapped about her, with her

nose frozen and her large eyes red and inflamed from excessive weeping, you would have wondered at it.

At what?

Well, here goes—I may as well make a clean breast of it. Remember I had seen her before and almost *in pura naturalibus*. I was in love with the "China girl" as the Doctor liked to call her—that was all.

Walla! Walla! Ah! how much power the mere mention of your name had to move me then! But one word in self-justification and then on to other matters. Even the Rev. Philpot admitted that never in all his wanderings had he seen beauty equal to Walla Benjow's, and that is saying a great deal.

As for the character of the poor child I need only say here that she was all affection and most gentle in her manners. Still I never dreamed of the intensity of passion of which she was capable, and I am sure Maurice didn't; furthermore—but I have said too much already. Let what remains develope itself.

Ten o'clock that morning saw us on the road again. Walla accompanied us, of course, for we had promised to do what we could to send her on to her relatives in the Kuen-lun country.

I remember how I fought against my feelings all that day. How amazed I was at myself for even permitting them to arise within me; I who had married and suffered; I who had sworn that no woman's face should ever again cause me a minute's thought. Do not be amazed when I confess the nature of those disturbing sentiments for the Doctor has already hinted at it.

Jealousy! Just think of it. I was jealous of Maurice.

"Ha! ha!" sneered Philpot, as he caught me looking toward them on one occasion when they were riding double on Maurice's mule. "Ha! ha! You're a fine philosopher, you are! Didn't you tell me you'd had enough of the women? Can't you see that those big eyes ain't turning your way? Be as I am, man! I wouldn't waste a moment's thought on the prettiest piece of femininity that ever stepped."

I turned on him then and administered a scathing rebuke. Heavens! I wished most devoutly I could echo his sentiments before we saw the great gate that admitted us to the lamasery of Psam-dagong.

It was just at sundown. The thermometer must have

been far below zero. We had enjoyed snow, rain, almost spring-like warmth and piercing cold all in the space of a few short days.

For hours we had seen the lonely group of buildings standing before us on the foothills of a mountain chain whose height far exceeded the range we had just crossed.

Nowhere else, not even in the Far West have I seen distances so deceptive. In that clear atmosphere twenty miles is nothing to the eye. Take it all in all we accomplished the journey with surprising ease as I came to know later; nevertheless our sufferings were intense.

Picture to yourself two broad ravines, one filled with large trees, the other horrible in its desolation, between which lay a narrow tongue of sloping land extending back toward the snow-clad peaks, which towered above us to stupendous heights.

It was on this projection that the lamasery of Psam-dagong stood, a cluster of square, white dwellings, flat roofed, with one pretty tower a little off the centre, rising above them, gilded and glittering with a thousand colors in the setting sun.

Once a famous shrine, the lamasery of Psam-dagong, about a century ago, became practically deserted, the Tale Lama at Lh'asa having so ordered it. Why this was I propose to explain in the chapters which follow, and need only add here that when I was at Psam-dagong it was little better than a mass of ruins, presided over by one old lama, of whom more anon.

But I am rambling on about these matters which, though of the highest interest to us at the time, are really quite immaterial in comparison with what follows. Let me break the spell by recording the end of our long journey at once.

Our ascent from the plains below was discovered by those in the lamasery, and upon reaching the gates we found ourselves challenged by a young lama of the yellow order, who bowed low before us.

"Peace be unto you, my lords lamas!" he said, in that subdued tone which one sometimes observes among Catholic devotees, "may your days be days of happiness and your nights be nights of peaceful sleep. What is your business at the holy house of Psam-dagong?"

I do not know what answer Mr. Mirrikh made him, for he spoke in Hindustanee, and Ah Schow, who translated the

lama's greeting knowing nothing of that tongue, remained silent.

Not that it matters. What is more to the point his answer was evidently acceptable, for the young lama threw the gates open and we rode into a wide enclosure.

At last we were at Psam-dagong.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLANETARY MAUSOLEUM.

MORNING! Morning among the mountains! The rising sun gilds the snow-clad peaks of the lofty Himalayas, they throw back its rays like so many huge reflectors, the plain below us glitters as though strewn with gems.

Standing in the embrasure of one of the tower windows of that ancient shrine of Buddha, I contemplated the scene in silent reverence. As the world's natural Creator rose to view, I seemed seized with some measure of my friend Mirrikh's enthusiasm, filled with the thought that it was but a reflection of the spiritual Creator of heaven and earth, whose existence in a less enthusiastic moment I would have denied. Instinctively I removed my hat and bowed my head before it, a mocking laugh echoing through the tower as I did so. The Doctor had caught me in the very act.

"Good! Very good, my bold agnostic!" he exclaimed in his most sarcastic tones. "So we have turned sun-worshiper, have we? What is there in the atmosphere of this strange land that transforms sensible fellows like my friend Wylde into soft-pated fools?"

I reddened, and only with difficulty restrained the lie which sprang to my lips. Something seemed to prevent me from denying the act, as I would have done.

"Pshaw! It was only a passing fancy, Doctor. I was thinking of sun-worshippers, I own, and I have the habit sometimes of acting out my thoughts."

"Flimsy," he retorted. "Wylde, your excuse is gauzy in the extreme, it won't wash! You are tarred with the same

stick as our friend De Veber. The next I shall hear you will be in the clutches of that precious humbug, Mirrikh, and fancy yourself on the road to Mars."

"By the way, have you seen Maurice this morning?" I asked anxiously, and not without good reason, for since we rose from the frugal meal spread by the young lama who had received us, I had seen nothing of Maurice. Mr. Mirrikh had taken him by the arm and departed immediately after our arrival.

There had been trouble about Walla, also.

The rule of the lamasery admitted no females. At Mr. Mirrikh's earnest solicitation it had been disregarded, but poor Walla was conveyed away to some remote part of the great enclosure, and I had spent a sleepless night in consequence of it all, the Doctor and I occupying a small room together, lying in our blankets upon the hard stone floor, for even here I saw no sign of beds.

"No, I have not seen Maurice," replied the Doctor, "and upon my word I begin seriously to wonder if we shall ever see him again."

"For God's sake what have you learned?" I exclaimed, grasping his arm.

"Nothing, nothing!" he replied hastily, and then speaking quite seriously for once, he continued:

"The fact is, Wylde, I like this business less than ever, and for the first time begin to feel serious alarm as to what may be our fate. Of course, so far as I am concerned, I have no one but myself to blame. I have traveled everywhere; Thibet is an unknown land and I was anxious to see it. Moreover, I confess to you I had some curiosity to follow up our man of mystery and see the end of his preposterous claims; yet, now that I am here, I tremble for our safety. We are in a country governed by a religious hierarchy of the most tyrannical description. Intelligent as these lamas are in some things, they are still but half savages. Let us suppose, for argument's sake, that Mirrikh really possesses some occult knowledge of which the world is ignorant. Are we to witness the display of this knowledge and afterward be permitted to leave this place alive?"

"God knows!"

"Nobody knows but the powers which control this lamasery. Don't let the glamor of our strange journey throw

you back into the trammels of superstition. Speak as you believe, man, and say nobody knows."

"But what are we to do?"

"God knows—plague on it! You see how catching it is. No matter though, your question brings me back to my object in seeking you. Come, Wylde, we are sent for, and, as our only safety lies in appearing to chime in with these people, we must respond at once."

"Who has sent for us?"

"I cannot say. That young lama—the only one we have seen so far—came to me directly you got up from breakfast, before Ah Schow had cleared away, and told me to call you at once. I've had a great hunt for you, old fellow, until at last I thought of your predilection for towers and sunrises, and here I am."

"And you saw no one on your way through the courtyard?"

"Not a soul. How is it with you?"

"Just the same. The place seems utterly deserted."

"That's what Ah Schow says. He slept in the stable with the mules, but, as you say, has not seen a soul."

It was certainly very mysterious. A vague sense of uneasiness oppressed me as I descended from the tower, and, in company with the Doctor, crossed the open courtyard with its flanking of low, white buildings, toward the door from which I had emerged.

But let me pause a moment in description before I proceed.

The lamasery of Psam-dagong, as my memory serves me, must have covered a space a thousand feet on the line of the slope by perhaps five hundred feet across.

Somewhere near the centre of this enclosure was the temple, which was but a small affair built of a greyish stone, with the tower into which I had penetrated unmolested separated from it; all around the sides, backed up against the high wall which surrounded the place, were low-roofed buildings of what I, as an American, should call adobe, dried mud whitewashed, really quite Mexican in their appearance; each had its door and single window made up of innumerable little panes of glass of fantastic shapes. Scattered through the enclosure were a few trees of enormous proportions and immense age evidently, but their species was quite unknown to me.

As we crossed this court the Doctor remarked on the general deserted aspect, and called my attention to the fact that I had previously noticed, namely, that up against the doors of almost all these detached buildings the snow lay banked.

It was quite obvious that Psam-dagong was no densely populated lamasery such as the good Abbe Huc, the only explorer who has given us a substantial record of his Thibetan experiences, tells about.

Afterward I came to know that ten souls were all those walls encompassed, but on that morning when the young lama conducted the Doctor and myself back across the court and into the temple, all was mystery, and I felt that the unknown lay before us. Since then, though years have passed, I can truthfully say that the happenings in the lamasery of Psam-dagong are enveloped in a veil of mystery still. But to return.

Through the low stone door way, above and about which wound a trailing dragon, carved in bold relief; through a dark and narrow passage, paved and musty smelling; through another door, and then into a large apartment, dimly lighted and shadowy, the "joss house," the Doctor called it, for there was a huge gilded Buddha rising at the back with tall candles burning before the altar, which was laden with offerings of the faithful, gifts of the wild tribes of the adjacent mountains who, at certain seasons, seek the lamasery to prostrate themselves before this image, the representative of their God.

Now I do not know what I expected to find upon entering this place and still less am I able to record the Doctor's thoughts, What we found was Maurice De Veber and the mysterious Mr. Mirrikh awaiting us. I beheld my friend with a sense of indescribable relief.

They were standing upon the tesselated pavement before the image talking in low tones together, while beside them, upon his knees, with his head bent until it touched the pavement, crouched a man, wearing the yellow dress of the order which controlled this shrine, a man of great age evidently, for his features were as dried and wrinkled as a withered apple, and the ring of hair which surrounded his tonsure, snowy white.

This is what I saw upon the occasion of my first visit to the temple.

And while speaking of the temple I want to say that I never met with the slightest opposition on the part of the lamas to my penetrating any part of the shrine. If there exists any holy of holies at Psam-dagong I never discovered it. Though firmly set in their own belief, I invariably found the lamas most charitable toward the belief of others. They knew perfectly well what and who I was—there was never any secret made about it. I know that as a race the Thibetans have no wish to be exclusive; it is their Chinese masters who have built up and maintain the wall of mystery which surrounds this strange people—that the day is not far distant when it will be broken down I believe as firmly as I do that the breaking will be of vast benefit to Thibet.

No sooner had we crossed the threshold than Maurice rushed toward me with open arms.

"George! My dear fellow! How contemptibly shabby you must think me for deserting you!" he exclaimed, "and I owe you an apology too, Doctor. The fact is, I ——"

He paused suddenly, for Mr. Mirrikh's eye was upon him. I shuddered as I saw its steady gaze transform Maurice, for the moment at least, into a being as cold and emotionless as himself.

"Gentlemen, good morning," said the adept, extending his hand to each of us in turn. "Mr. De Veber, I must inform your friends of the object of this meeting. If we are to start for Mars at midnight there is no time to waste."

Why did I bear it thus tamely? Why did I not launch forth my real sentiments against that man? Why had I ever remained silent? Why was the Doctor as dumb as myself?

God knows! All that I can say is that it was ever so from the first moment his will took that of Maurice De Veber under subjection.

He seemed to know when we were about to speak, to read our thoughts and in a measure control them. While we were with him these things did not strike me as they strike me now. I look back in wonder and ask myself the why and the wherefore, but no answer comes.

Now he checked Maurice in his intended communication, and equally we were checked in asking him further for it.

Maurice drew his arm through mine and pressed it affectionately. As for Philpot, he stood there looking absolutely stupid.

Such was the power of this man Mirrikh over minds sane

at the least. It was not the first time he had exercised it on mine nor was it to be the last.

Just then the old lama before the altar arose and bowing low, speaking words of salutation not intelligible to me, approached the spot where we stood.

Mirrikh took upon himself the ceremony of introduction and I am free to admit that he performed it in an entirely graceful way.

Now we knew that this was the Lama Superior of Psam-dagong, Padma by name. According to Mr. Mirrikh his years numbered more than a hundred, nor do I doubt it; certainly he bore all the appearance of a man of unusual age.

"Children, I greet you. Welcome to Psam-dagong!" he said in Hindustanee, and for the first time I heard that gentle voice which later I grew to love so well.

There was something inexpressibly sweet in the old man's very presence. A sphere of love, truth and purity seemed to surround him, yet to our eyes he looked simply a very old and ugly specimen of a Chinaman.

I noticed, however, that Philpot was not affected by him as I was; while to me his presence was pleasing, the Doctor drew away his hand in ill-concealed disgust.

Our adept saw it also and began in English immediately.

"Listen Mr. Wylde, and you too, Doctor;" he said, "the time has now come when we must have a definite understanding. We are at what you may justly consider the most remote corner of the earth. We are here for a distinct purpose. I need not tell you what that purpose is."

"We are here because we are fools ——" the Doctor began, when he was suddenly checked by that same mysterious influence which Mr. Mirrikh seemed to possess the power to exert by the mere raising of his hand.

"Argument being quite useless, I have determined to put a stop to it," he said; "that I have power to do so you are probably both aware by this time. Wylde you shall do the talking in this matter. Doctor, I beg your pardon, but do you see that fine piece of carving above the Buddha?"

Involuntarily the Doctor raised his eyes in the direction indicated, the adept with a movement of the hands quick as thought itself, making a pass before his face.

After that the Doctor's eyes were never lowered, never wavered a hair's breadth until we were ready to leave the

shrine, and the will of our strange conductor removed the hypnotic spell.

"I am sorry, Mr. Wylde, to have to resort to such means," he said, "but time is precious, and you know what the Doctor is. I don't even dare to allow you full freedom of mental action. I presume you perceive that your will is to a certain extent in subjection to influences over which you have no control."

"I do," I answered simply, wondering at the supreme quietude which seemed to have seized my soul.

"You attribute it to the action of my will, doubtless?"

"I do."

"You are mistaken. Let me impart a truth. I am exercising no control over you whatever, nor am I over your friend Maurice, as you believe."

"If not you, who then?"

"Intelligences in whose existence you do not believe; the immortal souls of men once clothed with a material body like your own."

I found myself incapable of reply.

Evidently he expected none, for he immediately continued:

"Have no fear. Nothing shall be done to injure you. As for De Veber, he consented to this step of his own free will. I am quite powerless to prevent him from carrying it out; indeed I have even urged him to withdraw."

"And I have refused, George, utterly refused;" spoke Maurice. "I would not back out under any circumstances; I am going to Mars."

"You hear," said the adept, "and this is what our chance meeting at Panompin has done for our friend. Pity the spiritual side of your nature is a blank page, Mr. Wylde; were it otherwise I could tell you so much that would interest you."

"George!" burst out Maurice, with something like his old enthusiasm; "it would amaze you. I am wild with anxiety to see this experiment tried. I ——"

Again he suddenly paused and was dumb, and yet Mirrikh never looked at him, but I thought I saw old Padma make a slight pass in his direction. Possibly this was imagination, for Padma could not have understood his words.

"You see," said the adept, "they will not let him speak."

"Who do you mean by they?"

"The pitries—spirits as you call them. I employ the Hindu term,"

"I call them nothing, for I deny their existence."

"Your denial of the world of causes falls flat with one whose vision is so constituted that he sees that world and its inhabitants all around you, as plainly as you see me."

"Meaning yourself?"

"Meaning myself, of course."

"I deny it utterly. I am willing to admit your powers as an adept; to allow that you understand Nature's laws as I do not, but further than that I will not go."

He smiled pityingly; a smile which at another time would have driven me furious but had no power to disturb me now.

"No, no; it is useless," he said. "Your Western minds cannot grasp it. A few to some slight extent are in the effort, and what is the result? Your scientists berate them furiously and dub them lunatics. Yet the time is at hand —close at hand."

"The time for what?"

"The time, sir, when men shall know that there is a living God who through His spirit messengers rules the existences of His creations. Shallow thinkers, blinded by the vaporings of their own conceit, alone can teach a world without a Creator; a universe without an ever-existing primal cause. But come, enough has been said. What interests you is how I came from the planet Mars, or rather how I propose to return to it. Follow me now and you shall be told."

The spell was broken, I rubbed my eyes like a man awakened from a dream.

He recalled the Doctor by a slight movement of the hand, and—but I cannot dwell upon this. Philpot assured me afterward that to him those moments were moments of utter oblivion, and that covers the ground.

"Lead the way, good Padma," said Mr. Mirrikh in Hindustanee.

The lama smiled in his gentle way; lighting a bronze lamp of antique pattern, he led us by a trap door behind the gilded Buddha, down a flight of stone steps to a large, square apartment under ground, a room which occupied the entire space of the temple walled up on all sides, save one, with stone.

"This," said the adept as we entered, "is the gate through which we depart for Mars."

We did not discuss it, the Doctor and I—we could not.

For the next half hour we were content to let Mr. Mirrikh do the talking, translating for the lama most of the time, for old Padma was acting as master of ceremonies. I believe now that the adept rendered his words truly, although at the time I could scarcely credit it.

It was a wonderful place, that underground chamber, and yet at first glance there was nothing to be seen except a huge, oblong block of marble as white as the snow above, occupying a central position on the stone floor.

It was seven feet long and three feet four inches wide, in one side there was set a little door of solid gold; but for this it was an unbroken block.

I have alluded to the three blank walls and hinted that the fourth was different. It was to this fourth wall that Padma directed our attention first.

This was divided into square spaces and reminded me much of the public vaults in the cemeteries at New Orleans. Filling each space was a section of hard, polished wood—ligum-vitae, I think, at all events it was intensely black and very heavy—into which was fixed a bronze handle with a gilded Thibetan character above. There were eighty of these sections altogether, and space left for fully twice as many more. Padma, laying his withered hand upon one of the gilded characters, proceeded to explain.

"These, my children, are the resting places of the bodies of those souls who seek to visit us from the planets in our solar system. In former years when this lamasery was first consecrated for that holy purpose, we scarcely had three bodies in at a time, but now there are only two out. Ah, they care not for this world, these planetary spirits. It is inferior to all others of our system, so what wonder? Behold!"

He grasped one of the handles and pulled, seeming to exert more strength than I believed him capable of. Slowly an oblong box moved forward, working on stone rollers. One glance sent me back with a shudder, for there, reposing in the box, was a human body wrapped in cloth, swathed about like an Egyptian mummy. Only the head was visible, and what startled me most was the face, which, though that of a middle-aged man, and by no means unhandsome, was of a color decidedly greenish, or perhaps I had better say greenish-yellow. If I had been told that it was the face

of a man who died of jaundice, I would have found it easier to believe than Padma's next words.

"This, my children, is the body used by the dwellers on the planet Mercury, the character you see here imprinted indicates that fact; and here in this compartment we have one from the planet next nearest to the sun."

"Thought Mercury was nearest the sun," groaned the Doctor helplessly.

Padma pulled the next handle above, returning the unfortunate Mercurian to his place.

I looked again. Maurice, who still held my arm, displayed the most intense eagerness as the coffin came out.

"I saw all this last night, George," he whispered. "Ain't it wonderful? What is there that man cannot accomplish after this?"

"What indeed?" I thought. "If man can wipe out the vast distances of interplanetary space, who is to say that his ambition shall pause even there? That it shall not aspire to a similar extinction of the stupendous breaks between our solar system and its neighbors. Clearly nothing! The thought, however, was paralysing. Was I yielding to the influences about me and becoming a believer in the claims of my friend Mirrikh? Not yet!

But to the second coffin—I might almost say sarcophagus, for it was as heavy as stone.

The adept had the lamp now, and he held it in such a manner that its light fell full upon the still, cold face before us. The heavily bearded features were of a deep bronze tint, verging toward that reddish patination which one sometimes finds on the coins of ancient Greece and Rome. The nose was aquiline and very prominent, the mouth large and sensual, while the forehead was contracted in a curious manner, giving the head a pointed appearance, strongly reminding one of the heads on the mysterious monuments in the ruined palace at Palenque.

"Of this race we have admitted none for many years," said the old lama quietly. "They are a fierce and vicious people. The last that occupied this body wrought so much evil that our gracious lord, the Tale Lama, sent imperative orders that they should in future be prohibited from taking on the earthly form.

He pushed the coffin back into place and moved to the next handle beyond.

Now we were shown the body of a young man whose face was white and of surprising beauty.

"Saturn is the meaning of that character, friend Wylde," said the adept, pointing to the gilded criss-cross of lines on this coffin.

"And each contains the body of a man from a different planet in our solar system?"

"Yes, and no. Each contains a body inhabited at some time by a human soul whose dwelling place was on a different planet. These bodies, however, are entirely of this earth."

"But how are they preserved?"

"You shall soon know. Let us finish our inspection first."

"I say, look here!" broke in the Doctor, "how many planets do you make? There are coffins enough here to do the business ten times over."

"You forget the asteroids," said the adept. "Besides, there is your own and other moons."

"All inhabited?"

"All inhabited or destined for inhabitants. God creates nothing in vain."

"This is madness! Driveling idiocy!" Philpot murmured.

No attention was paid to him, however. Our singular inspection went straight on.

Coffin after coffin was opened.

We were shown men from Venus, Jupiter, Uranus, Neptune, the asteroids, many moons, and other planets still further distant from the sun than the last named, for which our astronomers will ever search in vain.

This is according to Mr. Mirrikh, of course. For my part I neither assent or deny. I simply record what happened.

All were in human form. All were perfect men, and though all differed in appearance, the differences were no greater than those of men on this earth.

One, said to be of our moon, was dwarfish with an enormous head and a great deal of black, shaggy hair. Another, in a box labeled Venus, was just the reverse, being of huge proportions with a face as black as a Jamaica negro, and cruel, repulsive features; but there were two from this planet, the other being a man of ordinary appearance and white.

One thing I observed, namely, that the further removed from the sun the planet, the more refined and intellectual

appeared to be the face. I spoke of this to Mr. Mirrikh and his answer confirmed my observations.

"It is so," he said; such is the rule. The sun is the centre of all planetary life, but it is at the circumference of every solar system that the highest intellectual development is found."

But there was one handle which the old lama had thus far left untouched. Odd, too, that not until now did I think of it. We had been shown no man from Mars.

I moved forward and touched it.

"And this—why was this one omitted?" I asked.

The adept smiled and said something to the lama in Hindustanee.

Approaching my side the old man pulled the coffin forward. It came easily and no wonder, for it was empty.

"My place, gentlemen," said Mr. Mirrikh, calmly; "thank God this body will soon be in it. This is for Mars!"

But there was but one other empty. None of the planets, however, were unrepresented. The vacant coffin bore characters which the adept claimed indicated one of the asteriods, he could not speak its English name.

"And is the body which should fill it now animated by a soul and walking about this earth?" I inquired.

He answered that it was so.

Impossible, indeed, will it be for those who may read this part of my narrative to comprehend the reluctance with which it has been penned.

Believe it no one will, of course; but believe me when I say that had it been possible to have left it unwritten and still rendered intelligible that which is to follow, it would never have been told.

It was over. We stood beside the altar; my friend Mirrikh had begun to speak.

"Mr. Wylde, after what you have seen you have an undoubted right to the explanation which yours or any other intelligent mind will naturally demand. Here are your questions—I know them before they are uttered. The agent which is capable of producing this separation of the spiritual and the material, of the soul and the body; what is it? Is not that the first?"

"It is," I replied. "You have stated it correctly."

"You have seen those bodies—they are not phantasies—they are facts?"

"Either facts or I am hopelessly mad."

"You are the same level headed American you were when I astonished you at Panompin, my friend. Now what you most wish to know is why those bodies do not follow the law of nature and decay?"

"You have said it."

"And know you shall. Listen. You, in that truly liberal spirit which I have from the first admired; have been willing to admit the existence of natural forces of which your western science may be ignorant."

"I have never denied the possibility of such forces."

"No; more liberal than the so-called learned of your race you never have. Mr. Wylde you now stand face to face with the workings of just such a force. It is an invisible, imponderable gas; as elementary as oxygen, but utterly unknown outside of adept lore. This gas is generated under certain natural conditions within the earth itself, and is of such rare occurrence on this particular planet that the knowledge of its existence has hitherto been confined to the few. In fact it occurs in two places only, so far as is known, the cavern within which we are now standing being one.

This aroused the Doctor whose dazed condition had scarcely changed.

"You are speaking of the unknown and deadly gas mentioned by Huc, as occurring in the valley of Bourhan-bota," he exclaimed suddenly.

"It is the same," replied the adept. "That is the other place referred to; doubtless it is but another outlet for the same deposit—at least it is so believed. The good Abbe heard of it, but by the common people its peculiar properties are quite unknown. Whoever ventures near that valley dies to all appearance. In truth the unfortunate is in the same condition as those bodies we have just seen."

"Alive?" I cried. "They cannot be alive?"

"They are not alive nor are they dead. They are the bodies of lamas who have inhaled the gas during the centuries the lamasery has been consecrated to this lofty purpose. The souls which left them to seek other planets have long since passed beyond the realm of matter into the realm of spirit—they will never return. Since then most of these bodies have many times been animated by other souls. One may be thus animated at any moment and spend years on

this earth, subject to all natural laws, you understand; even the inevitable law of death."

"Should such a thing happen how would the soul make its presence in the body known?"

"Padma would know."

"But how?"

"How did I know the girl was perishing in the snow that night? Mr. Wylde I think I have answered all your questions now."

"But your answers only call up a thousand more," I exclaimed. "Why have these bodies not decayed? That still remains untold."

"Once this gas is inhaled the body never decays until it is buried in the earth—sometimes when certain chemical properties are lacking in the soil, not even then."

"Its name?"

"In Hindustanee, *Zambri.*"

"Meaning nothing to me."

"Of course not. How can it?"

"And once this gas is inhaled, the spirit can leave the body?"

"It must leave it in obedience to a natural law as inexorable as that which brings a stone thrown upward back again to the ground. The spirit then seeks the point upon which its mind was last fixed, but it can return at will after a few hours have passed, for in that time the fumes of the gas lose their full effect; or, on the other hand, it can remain absent for years and still return. All rests with the will. The body will not decay unless the gas is either recombined or expelled. Does this open your eyes?"

"It opens a train of thought simply incomprehensible. But suppose the spirit wills to go to Mars, for instance, what——"

"What will it do for a body there?"

"You anticipate my question."

"I anticipate because you are treading on ground which I cannot permit you to enter. It is sufficient for you to know that you earth dwellers alone of all mankind are ignorant on this subject. On no planet in our solar system to which a spirit thus freed might project itself, are such transmigrations not of common occurrence. The spirit is guided by God's loving forethought, incarnated or disincarnated. A receptacle will be provided for it; once at its destination

it will walk that earth in a body precisely similar to the one it left behind—made so, in fact, by its own will."

"And it would be otherwise were it to project itself to a distant point on this earth?"

"Unfortunately, yes. The same conditions do not here obtain."

"And does this explain the different appearances of these bodies? None of them resemble Thibetans."

"You have hit it. Originally all were Thibetans. They have been transfigured by the planetary spirits who in turn have occupied them. This act causes pain and takes time; therefore the bodies are kept separate ready for use of spirits from each inhabited earth or moon. I took this body just as I found when I came from Mars. You begin to understand?"

"My amazement only increases. Do not ask me to believe."

"It would be useless to expect it."

"One question more."

"Ask it."

"Why is all this kept a secret? Why is this place practically abandoned? Why is not all the world made to share in this alleged wonderful knowledge? Why——"

"Stop—stop! Don't multiply your questions so! Know, my friend, that he who pronounced a little knowledge a dangerous thing, was the very king of kings among philosophers. The adepts learned the truth of this maxim by sad experience. The secret was put to evil uses, and for excellent reasons Psam-dagong stands to-day the deserted shrine it is."

"And this is your great secret!" I cried. "This is the fate toward which you have been gradually drawing that innocent boy by your devilish arts! Could I admit the existence of spirits at all, I——"

"Stop, George! For God's sake stop!" interposed Maurice. "It is all my own doing, not his."

"You are mad, Maurice!"

"No, no! I have weighed all the consequences. I am going, George; you will wait for me and I shall return!"

"But these are the ravings of a lunatic! Be sensible, Maurice! Be yourself. These bodies are nothing but the embalmed remains of poor fools, who, like ourselves, have been inveigled into this place for some hellish purpose be-

yond our comprehension. Delusion! delusion! What else can it be but delusion? Granted a soul, is it yet in the nature of things that such a journey could be accomplished. God help me! I shall hear next that we can migrate to other planetary systems—that we can fly to the end of the universe——"

"Which," interrupted the adept with that same immeasurable calmness, "has, like the God who made it, neither beginning nor end!"

"I am the alpha and the omega!" muttered the Doctor, "the beginning and the end!"

He was staring at us helplessly, picking a shred of cloth into little pieces. As he pronounced these words he began humming one of those grand old Gregorian chants which, no doubt, he had listened to in his own pulpit a thousand times.

What ailed the man?

I shuddered as I looked at him. He was worse even than before,

The adept seemed to read my thoughts.

"Don't be alarmed. It is nothing," he said. "It is necessary to keep his tongue still—that is all."

"Hypnotized?"

"If you like the term. The truth is he is controlled by a spirit, at my request."

"God help us all!" I murmured. "I wish some spirit at my request would pick us up bodily and throw us in the middle of the Sahara, rather than we should stay one instant longer under your cursed influence, my heathen friend!"

But it was not to be that I could arouse his anger.

As toward myself, truth compels me to say that the man never appeared different than the calm philosopher of the Nagkon Wat, nor did he outwardly toward Maurice. And, although God alone can read in their entirety the intentions of any man; although I may wrong the adept most grievously, I believed then, and I believe it still, that his was the will which drove Maurice forward to his fate.

CHAPTER XV.

ALIVE OR DEAD.

"GRANTED for argument's sake that it was all true," said the Doctor; "admitted that the stupendous claims of this man rest on a solid foundation; that the ravings of Swedenborg are cold facts; that the re-incarnation theories of Reynaud and Kardec have a leg to stand on; that spirits exist, invisible and intangible, bobbing about like so many shuttle cocks in the insuperable abysses of interplanetary space; admitting it all, even at the expense of making a pair of blooming idiots of ourselves, what are we going to do about it, George Wylde? That's what I want to know."

And in very truth the Doctor had propounded a weightier question than any of the astounding propositions of my man Mirrikh.

What were we going to do about it, sure enough?

"We can't pick Maurice up bodily and run away with him, don't you know," continued the Doctor. "If the thing were possible why I'd be the first to do it, but the rub is, Maurice is a man and he won't go."

"And a very positive one, let me tell you."

"Aye! Don't I know it? By the living Cæsar! I pity him I never realized the power of this hypnotism business as I do now."

"You would, if you could have seen yourself, Doctor—you acted like a man clean gone with paresis."

"Thank God I remember nothing at all about that part of it."

"But you saw the bodies—you heard our talk."

"In a half dazed way, yes. It is all a blur in my mind, Wylde; like a dream a fellow wants to remember and can't, don't you know? Heavens and earth! If we could only get away from this infernal place. What do you say to you and me——"

"Don't you suggest leaving Maurice!" I interrupted, frowning darkly. "If you have any plan to propose which will rescue that poor boy from Mirrikh's clutches, why out with it; otherwise——"

I paused abruptly, for a bell had sounded, a deep toned gong of enormous size which rested behind the gilded Buddha in the temple above us. Its clang sent a thrill of horror to my heart.

Instantly five yellow forms sprang to their feet and ranged themselves about the white altar, for we were again in that subterranean mausoleum beneath the shrine.

It was far on toward midnight; the day following our arrival at the lamasery was closing. Without, the cold was intense and the stars shining in that rarified atmosphere with a brilliancy of which few who read these lines can form the least idea.

We had seen nothing of Maurice since we left the vault hours before, nor of Mr. Mirrikh, nor of the girl Walla; even old Padma had vanished, and the only person who we could discover was the young lama, Ni-fan-lu. We had pushed through the deserted houses in the court, prowled about the temple, and explored the tower. Locked doors we found, and these probably concealed the objects of our search, but we knocked here and there—pounded on them —waiting in vain for a reply.

You see we had come back into the temple shortly after the termination of the conversation narrated in the previous chapter.

The Doctor was himself again as soon as we had passed the image, where Ni-fan-lu awaited us.

"Be brave my friends!" said the adept. "Have patience to endure to the end. Think of what a glorious mission will then be yours, to father these stupendous and hitherto unknown truths!"

"Farewell, George!" added Maurice, wringing my hand. "Doctor, all good go with you! Once again before I take the final leap we shall certainly meet."

I would have detained him, but I could not.

Let me show myself in all my weakness, I wept, I pleaded with him; by all the ties he held dear, I begged him to pause before it was too late.

Useless—quite useless!

"Don't be absurd, old fellow! What are we here for?" was his only reply.

It was not like him. Though he never displayed the affection for me that I had foolishly shown toward him, he had ever been considerate of my feelings.

But as he turned away and walked arm in arm with the adept through the dim interior of the shrine, amid armored gods and green and red dragons, I felt a strange calmness creep over me, and I simply stood there with the Doctor on one side and Ni-fan-lu on the other, watching them as they went out of sight.

Night came on.

Still it was the Doctor and I, with occasionally Ah Schow and always Ni-fan-lu, whose stupidity was as vast when he did not want to talk as was his shrewdness when he did. Poor Ah Schow, who really tried to do his best to draw some information out of him, particularly on the subject of Walla had given up long ago in despair.

And so hour succeeded hour, until Ni-fan-lu, returning after a brief absence a little later than eleven o'clock, announced that we were sent for and were to go to the temple at once, which proved to mean that horrible mausoleum beneath it, for it was thither he conducted us and here we were.

Not a little to our surprise we found five yellow lamas seated upon the floor cross-legged as we entered.

They bowed to us respectfully, bobbing their shaven heads like so many porcelain mandarins, but they did not speak. Ni-fan-lu made a sixth and stationed himself at the foot of the stone staircase. On the other side of the long room, lying in a dark corner, was what I then took to be a bundle of sheepskins thrown down carelessly; in fact it was not easy to get a clear view of anything, for the only light was that shed by the small bronze lamp resting on the altar, where I had seen old Padma place it after he closed the last of the coffin drawers, whose gilded hieroglyphics were now staring us out of countenance. Wondering what all this portended, the Doctor and I just resolved ourselves into a ways and means committee and stood there talking together in low tones, when all at once, clang! went the great gong in the temple above and I felt instinctively that the critical moment was at hand.

"Gad, George! It's too late! We can do nothing!" exclaimed the Doctor. "The long and short of it is they're going to sacrifice that poor wretch. It's all a part of their devilish heathen dogmas—I know!"

Alas for the narrow bigotry of our vaunted age of light! As if no poor wretch has ever been offered up as a sacrifice by the priests of Christ!

I shuddered, but made no answer. I was not my friend's keeper. Mad or sane, he was a free agent according to his own statement, and I had no word of pleading or protest to offer which had not been already spoken. The die was cast. Maurice must go his own road.

Now as I raised my eyes I saw him descending, and found myself lost in wonder at the calm, determined look which overspread his handsome face.

First came old Padma, bearing in his hand an object which looked like a huge, golden ear-trumpet. Maurice followed, his black cloak trailing on the stones as he descended. Mr. Mirrikh came last, looking precisely as he always did.

As they advanced, the yellow lamas arranged themselves on either side of the altar, three and three, for Ni-fan-lu now joined the others. The Doctor and I alone seemed out of place. Now Maurice saw us at last and breaking away rushed toward me.

"Oh, George! My friend!" he burst out; "it is only you who stands between me and the most supreme happiness at this moment! I feel so sorry for you, George!"

I drew him aside and spoke for his ear alone; nor did any one show the slightest disposition to interfere.

"Is there nothing that I can say to move you, my boy? I whispered, controlling myself to an extent I would not have believed possible a moment before.

"Nothing, old friend, nothing."

"What has this man told you that you are holding back? What is it that gives you the courage to pursue this mad adventure to its end?"

"I cannot reveal it, George—I have sworn not to. One thing I will say though, and I want you to understand it definitely. I shall be back here inside of a month—he has promised it, and you, George, must promise me to wait."

"Maurice," I answered, pressing his hand most affectionately, "I swear to you that so long as your body remains in the condition of the bodies in those boxes, I shall never leave it until I, myself, depart for that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns."

"I knew it, old fellow! I knew it! But for you, George, I could not muster up the courage."

"Not that I expect, if you persist in your purpose, ever to see your body reanimated," I added sadly; "but while

there is a doubt, I am with you. My belief is that unless you instantly exercise all the force of your will to throw off the glamor this man has cast over you, my dear boy, you are hopelessly lost."

"No, George, no! It cannot be. I am favored as never man was favored before—I am going to Mars and I shall return."

"Maurice! Maurice! Will nothing arouse you?"

"I don't want to be aroused."

"There is just the trouble. You——"

"Stop, George! This is all old ground, there is no profit for either of us in treading it again. Good-bye, old friend. God bless you! Good-bye!"

He tore himself away, though I tried to stop him. The next I knew he was shaking hands with the Doctor and the man Mirrikh had hold of me.

The instant his hand touched mine it was as though I had experienced a powerful electric shock. Through my brain some subtle magnetic current seemed darting—the same sensations shot down my back and into my legs and feet. I would have sprung toward Maurice, but to my horror found myself rooted to the floor with my eyes fixed upon his eyes and my tongue helpless; I could no longer speak.

"Farewell, friend Wylde," he said, pressing my hand warmly. "Pardon me for rendering you powerless to defeat our plans. I have left you your intelligence, however —you shall see us go!"

I tried to speak—to curse him. Oh God! how hard I tried—how utterly I failed!

"Do not fear!" he added. "I swear to you by God eternal that Maurice De Veber shall return!"

Still I struggled—struggled with all the strength of my will—still I failed.

Now he withdrew his hand and raised it theatrically; mine, released, falling helplessly to my side.

"Write!" he said, a rapt expression overspreading his countenance. "Write and let the world know! Farewell, my friend! Farewell!"

He moved toward the altar before which old Padma now knelt in silent prayer.

My eyes followed him; though helpless physically, my brain was unaltered in its activity.

An immeasurable passivity seemed to have settled over

me. No longer struggling, I watched with intense interest all that occurred.

As for the Doctor I knew later that he was in precisely the same condition. As I saw him then he stood there like a statue, motionless and silent. Could either of us question the reality of the occult after this?

For the space of a few moments all was silence. Maurice and the adept were kneeling at the altar by the lama's side, evidently in prayer.

Presently they arose and faced us. The critical moment had come at last.

Now music soft, sweet and low, sounded through the subterranean chamber. It was produced by the six lamas; each held a small, one-stringed instrument, closely resembling the Chinese banjo, and as they struck the strings in concert it seemed to me that never had I heard such harmony—it was divine!

Meanwhile, Padma had taken up the trumpet-shaped implement and having opened the little golden door in the side of the altar, pressed the flaring mouth against it. To my surprise it remained fixed in its position after a moment, as though held by suction. Instinctively I seemed to understand that the little door communicated with the cavern beneath the temple; that this was the means by which they were to inhale the mysterious gas. Once in place the golden tube stood up about as high as a man's waist, and I saw that the end was plugged. All appeared to be in readiness now, and old Padma drew back, murmuring some unintelligible sentences—his eyes were turned toward the adept—he pointed toward the tube with a wave of his wrinkled hand. Again Mr. Mirrikh spoke.

"Maurice De Veber, think well before you take the final step," he said in clear, distinct tones. "What your friends refuse to believe, you know to be the truth. No persuasion of mine has urged you to this act. Say the word and I start on my long journey alone."

There was no sign of wavering in Maurice's voice as the answer came.

"I am going with you!" he replied quietly. "Do not let us prolong this painful scene."

"It is enough," said the adept. "Friends, once more farewell!"

He stepped forward, bent over the tube, removed the

plug, and fixing his mouth about the aperture drew three long, deep inhalations, after which he calmly restored the plug and stood aside.

"It is your turn now," he said. "Have courage! Remember, there is a good God above us all!"

Helpless! Oh pitying Father! Why was I so helpless? How gladly would I have risked my life to rush forward and drag Maurice from the fatal spot!

Nor was I alone in my desire. Unknown to me there was present in that room another whose feelings were as intense as my own.

She came with a rush. She dashed between the lamas, sending Padma reeling back against the altar. With her long, black hair streaming behind her, she prostrated herself at Maurice's feet.

"Ye gods!" I thought; "it is Walla!" For I now saw that what I had taken for the pile of sheepskins in the corner was none other than the girl whose life we had twice preserved.

"No! No! No!" she cried, in tones so vehement that in spite of the spell which bound me I trembled. "No! you shall not! You must not! I love you! Oh, God, how I love you! Save him! Save him! Let it be me instead!"

Jealousy—mad jealousy seized me. I thought less of Maurice than of Walla Benjow, then! She go! Never! I struggled with my helplessness, struggled fearfully, and I think I had almost won the victory when I saw that it was too late.

Padma seized her. A few quick passes over that shapely head and the girl had ceased to rave.

"Meanwhile Maurice never said anything. I saw and understood the look of amazement which came over his face—he had not even dreamed of such a possibility as this.

"Be good to her, George!" he called. "Good bye again old fellow! Good bye!"

It was done!

Unhesitatingly he removed the plug and inhaled the fatal gas!

Loud twanged the strings, and the voices of the lamas burst forth into a wild chant.

Vanished now was the power I had almost gained. Sight and hearing alone stood by me—I listened and looked—I saw Mr. Mirrikh sinking slowly to the stone floor.

His eyes were closing, his face had assumed a deathly whiteness, and—oh God! Maurice was going down, too! In an instant both lay prostrate at the altar's foot.

Once I thought he looked toward me as the lids descended; there was deep affection in the look—there was also supreme confidence that I would keep my word and stand by him to the last.

Again my eyes were for him alone, but I think my brain must have been obscured, for I saw, or thought I saw, that the form of my friend was growing thin and shadowy, just as I had seen in the case of the adept in the alley at Panompin.

Was it this, or was it that a thin, white mist surrounded Maurice? It seemed to be gathering all about him—it was assuming the shape and outlines of a man. Presently it separated itself from the body entirely, rose up and stood above it, looking down.

Now there were two Maurices!

Wonderingly I sought the adept.

It was the same with him, but that I had seen before. He stood above his own body a perfect man.

"George, farewell! I am off for Mars!" spoke the old familiar voice as distinctly as I ever heard it speak; and I saw those shadowy forms rise together, slowly at first, then more rapidly, moving faster and faster, until——

Heavens! Was it then but a dream after all?

I was quite myself again and standing close to the altar, upon which, cold and still, lay the body of Maurice De Veber, stretched out at full length.

The light burned low, the music had ceased, the yellow lamas had vanished; I saw only Padma and the Doctor at my side.

And Maurice? I had sworn never to leave that body!

Was Maurice alive or dead?

CHAPTER XVI.

DIABLERIE.

"SHADES of Paracelsus!" cried the Doctor. "If this ain't the most amazing thing I ever saw?"

The Doctor stood on the opposite side of the altar looking at me. In spite of the vigor of his exclamation, he appeared to be calm and collected. I saw that he had pulled Maurice's shirt open and was feeling about inside, trying to find the heart.

"Thank God you are yourself again," I murmured. "It's all over now, I suppose."

"You mean with Maurice?"

"Of course! Who else?"

You forget, brother Wylde, that there still exists an individual of the name of Philpot—besides, there is the girl and yourself."

"Waste no words now, for heaven sake! Only tell me if he is dead."

"Just what I am trying to find out, my dear fellow. Be patient a moment and we shall see."

For fully ten minutes he labored, displaying, as he had done in the case of Walla's father, a method in his work which bore out his claim to some medical skill.

Anxiously absorbed, I watched, unable to turn my thoughts until at length he drew back and boldly pronounced his *dictum*.

"It's no use talking, Wylde; Maurice is dead."

And the Doctor believed it—nor can I blame him. I often wonder how I had the hardihood to face him down as I did.

"It makes no difference what you or any one else say!" I cried passionately. "I will never leave that body until Nature sets her final seal upon it! Where's the other one? Where is that scoundrel Mirrikh? What——"

"Hush—sh!" he interposed. For God's sake restrain yourself and remember that we are entirely at the mercy of these people. Look behind you—we are not alone."

His words produced their effect, for they brought me to a realizing sense of the fact that if I meant to stay by Maurice I had to keep in the good graces of the powers which controlled the lamasery. There was Walla, too! Had I forgotten her?

Yes, Walla was there. When I looked around I saw her. She lay crouched all in a heap at the foot of the altar where she had first flung herself.

In an instant I was at her side and strove to take her in my arms, but she repulsed me. Murmuring some broken words in an unknown tongue, she pushed me away.

I staggered back and stared around the place. Again that strange magnetic current went darting through my brain.

Behind her kneeled old Padma, turning a silver prayer wheel, its monotonous click ringing out sharply in the stillness. The body of the adept, however, had disappeared.

I passed my hand before my eyes as though that would banish the strange sensations which were oppressing me. "I must be calm," I reflected. "I must restrain myself and act only for the best."

"Oh Jerusalem! If I only had a smoke!" groaned the Doctor. "It might steady my nerves a bit. Would you think me a perfect ghoul if I felt in Maurice's pocket for his tobacco bag, Wylde? There's his flask, too."

"There is no necessity. He gave both to me this morning to give to you," I answered, producing the articles in question.

"*Laus Deo.* The country is safe! Give me just one moment to fire up and I'll argue with you for the rest of the night."

He filled the pipe with a hand which trembled visibly. He was badly shaken, no doubt of that, but he seemed to revive after a pull at the flask.

Meanwhile I stood stroking back the curls from Maurice's brow, dreaming. Picture after picture presented itself before me with a vividness that made me almost wonder why I doubted the sincerity of those who claim clairvoyant sight.

I was back at Swatow. For an instant I even thought my wife stood before me, holding in her arms the babe we had buried on the other side of the globe. I was on the steamer —I saw Maurice, as I had first seen him; careless, gay and handsome. I was in the old consulate at Panompin—we

were discussing metaphysics. I was again the negative, he the positive. It was all his effort that I should be aroused from my lethargy, lifted out of myself! Then before me rose in all their massive sublimity, the triple towers of the Nagkon Wat. I saw the big Buddha of Ballambong. We were in the old tower storm-bound. Mirrikh—that horrible Mirrikh—was forming as a whitish cloud at my feet; when suddenly—snap went the Doctor's match; the flame flared up above the pipe bowl, and my visions vanished with the smoke.

"Now I can talk," said the Doctor, satisfiedly. "Nothing like it when you are rattled. Wylde you have got us into a horrible mess."

"I know it. I wish I might have died before I ever met Maurice."

"Oh, bosh! To the dogs with your sickly sentiment. I want to review the situation that we may get out of this infernal scrape if we can."

"I am listening."

"First of all, do you know what was done with Mirrikh?"

"No."

"Ah! Then I am ahead of you there. Thought I was able to throw off their infernal magnetism first. I either dreamed it, or I saw the lamas put it in the empty coffin in the niche—the one he said it belonged in—the one marked for Mars."

"Oh this hypnotism!" I murmurmed. "Doctor, why could you not resist it? You, with all your boasted strength of will?"

"Wylde, you were hypnotized, too."

"I don't deny it. But with your will it might ——"

"The devil! The smallest of them seem to have power over me. Hope that old crow Padma don't understand what I am saying. Say, Wylde, did you see it all?"

We compared notes for the space of at least ten minutes. Let me say briefly that all I saw, the Doctor saw, and more. He heard the voice, too, as it called that last farewell; and like myself, after that he seemed to lose consciousness completely. Next he knew he was standing by the altar looking down upon Maurice's body just as I had done. In short, his experience was the exact duplicate of mine with the exception that he saw the adept's body put in the coffin, and a few minor points.

I believe we might have kept on talking indefinitely, had not the sudden cessation of the clicking prayer wheel turned our attention to Padma, who was in the act of rising from his knees.

"Speak to him, Doctor!" I whispered. "Beg him to release that poor girl from the hypnotic influence. It breaks my heart to see her so."

The Doctor tried it in Hindustanee, and if I may believe his assertion, got along splendidly.

"It's no use to interfere with his plans, George," he said, after a moment. "He says the girl is all right. He claims that she is a powerful sensitive, and more amazing than all he swears—what do you suppose?"

"Don't keep me in suspense, I beg of you, Doctor."

"He says he is going to show us Maurice and Mr. Mirrikh in the astral body. We are to see them on their road to Mars."

"In other words, he is going to hypnotize us again."

"I'm afraid so, and by the living Cæsar! if he tries it I'll smash him. Hold on, George! What in thunder is he about? This reminds one strangely of the Black Art!"

Pausing before Walla, Padma was tracing about her on the stone floor an imaginary circle, using for the purpose a slender brass rod, which he drew from beneath his cloak.

He made no effort to disturb us; not even by those now dreaded mesmeric passes, but kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the stones, as he slowly walked three times about the girl, chanting in a low voice.

Why did we not interfere?

Do not ask me. We could not. Put it down to cowardice if you wish, but I hold the occult influences which seemed to pervade the place, responsible for it. We did not—that is enough.

Now our whole attention seemed to concentrate itself on the old lama, with an intensity which banished all other thoughts.

He moved away to a distant part of the room, and though I tried to follow him with my eyes, I found I could not, for they were closed as though by a hand drawn suddenly down over my forehead. I want it distinctly understood that I *felt* the touch of this hand—that it was real and no way the outgrowth of my imagination. The Doctor had the same experience, only he swore afterward that the hand which

closed his eyes was a child's hand, and I know the one which touched me was big and rough—the hand of a full grown man.

Suddenly our eyes opened of their own accord, and there was Padma before us again. He now held a large, oval bowl of solid gold, chased in curious pattern and filled to the brim with a liquid of the most intense black. It's surface, as he set it down at Walla's feet, instantly became as smooth as glass, and I could see the face of the girl reflected in it. I thought of Doctor Dee and his wonderful stone, of the magic mirrors of the Arabian Nights, and I thought I understood.

"Say, Wylde," whispered the Doctor; "I've been over this ground before in India. There's something in it. You'll see."

Once the bowl was in place, our eyes closed again.

"Wonderful!

This time I felt the child's hand, and the Doctor swore by all good and holy, that the hand which touched him was a man's. Indeed he clapped his own hand to his head and tried to grasp it, but failed, of course. When our eyes next opened, there stood old Padma again with a small brazier, a bronze dish and a basket of charcoal at his side. Now who could longer doubt the *diablerie* of the whole affair?

The old lama placed the brazier at some little distance from Walla, and stood the dish upon it, having previously lighted the coals beneath.

So much did the brazier resemble the tripod of such common occurrence upon ancient Greek coins, that I began wondering if it could by any possibility be a relic of the Bactrians. That it was from a Greek model there can be no doubt.

By this time the Doctor was growing cool again; so much so that he ventured to question Padma about his preparations.

The old lama muttered a few words in reply, to me, of course, wholly unintelligible, and after that paid no further attention to either of us, but went straight on with his work.

"By Jove, he's a good one!" said the Doctor.

"What does he say?" I whispered.

"Well, it amounted to telling me to mind my own business, George. He says if we keep still we shall see Maurice. Of course you understand that this is the black magic of the

East. It is simply a hallucination produced by the reflex action of a strong will upon a weaker one. All these preparations are mere clap-trap. I saw the same thing at Benares some years ago."

"You mean white magic, do you not? Black magic is turned against a man, not for his benefit."

"Bah! It's all equally rubbish, black or white—but let us watch him. We may discover some part of the trick."

Watch! There was no need to urge me. I could not have taken my eyes off Padma had I tried.

He had been blowing the coals while the Doctor was speaking, and now as they burst forth into flame he laid aside the little brass-backed bellows used for the purpose, and drew from beneath his loose robe a small box of beaten gold. This he opened and placed upon the altar in close proximity to Maurice's head. It was a curious old affair, about four inches in length by three across, and an inch and a half deep, the top and sides were covered with cabalistic figures, beaten up in high relief.

From this he took a small vial not unlike a homœopathic medicine bottle, and removing the stopper flung its contents into the dish. Instantly a lambent flame shot up, resembling the flame of alcohol, which, for all I know, it may have been. Returning the bottle to the box the lama next took out a small packet, which proved to be a greyish powder wrapped up in Chinese rice paper. A little of this was also thrown into the dish, and immediately the flame changed from blue to an intense crimson. I thought then it was the strontium light, and but for the singular fact that during fully half an hour the flame continued to burn uninterruptedly without further addition either from the bottle or the packet, I might think so still.

"That's it! That's it!" whispered the Doctor. "Wait, Wylde! He'll surprise you in a minute. Once you get your attention fixed on that flame he'll make you believe you see your grandmother—you'll see." But not yet was I fascinated by the flame.

Now Padma moved toward us and with an imperious wave of the hand bade us follow him.

He took us across the room to the side where the corpses were stored, seized one of the handles and pulled.

Slowly the heavy box moved from its niche and we beheld the body of our adept lying within, swathed in white

just as were the others shown us the morning before. Only his face was visible; that never to be forgotten face, yellow above, black beneath. I can see it before me now with terrible distinctness, wearing that same calm, peaceful expression which under all circumstances it ever wore. The eyes were closed, and when I placed my hands upon it the flesh was icy cold. In all respects it resembled the face of a corpse.

Closing the drawer, Padma now led us to the altar and pointed to Maurice.

"Touch the face," he said quietly, "You will find it like the other—yet he lives!"

We both touched it. Here was the same clammy coldness, and my heart, which was beginning to feel a ray of hope, again sank in despair.

Could I doubt that Maurice was dead? Could I credit the aged lama's claim?

Meanwhile the flame in the dish was blazing away as brightly as ever, shooting upward in slender tongues of crimson light.

Motioning for us to resume our places before the tripod, Padma stood over poor Walla and began making passes about her head.

Merciful God! How I inwardly cursed him! I was powerless to raise a finger to stop it or to speak a word, yet in all else I seemed entirely master of myself. Did my own curiosity as to what was to come, afford the lever by which my will was controlled?

A moment or two of this, and then Padma was at the tripod again, bowing reverently before the flame. I saw his face touch it—I saw him actually kiss it. The tongues of fire shot up all about him, played through the fringe of snow white hair surrounding his tonsure, shot about his eyes, covering his whole face in fact, and yet he was not burned.

For several moments this continued, the Doctor pressing my arm in silent awe.

Suddenly the lama straightened up again and moved back to Walla's side. The girl, meanwhile, had never changed her position nor even raised her head. Taking her hands he placed them against the sides of the bowl which contained the black liquid and there they remained.

Again flitting back before the tripod, the aged lama raised his voice in solemn chant, his eyes fixed upon a small scroll which he had taken from the box and unrolled.

Later we knew that this was written in the ancient Persian tongue, and as the Doctor was afterward permitted to copy it, I am fortunately able to give the translation here.

" The sun ! the sun ! Creator ! Lord,
God, almighty ! Show thy face
and let the earth rejoice.
The moon ! the moon ! Child
of the earth ! Storehouse of
magnetic forces whose face
is forever hidden; bend
thy malevolent gaze not
upon us lest we, thy
brethren, wither and die.
Spirits of the heavens conjure !
Spirits of the earth conjure !

" The stars ! the stars ! Suns,
worlds, moons innumerable ! Oh east,
where is thy beginning ?
Oh west, where is thy
ending ? North, thou art
not. South, thou never wast.
The comets ! the comets !
the flaming swords ! Mighty
messengers from the
Omnipotent ! Renewers
of magnetic forces; from one
thou takest that thou mayest
give to another, equalizing all.
Spirits of the heavens conjure !
Spirits of the earth conjure !

" The earth ! the earth ! The
sea ! The desert without
water ! The rivers ! The
mountains ! the lofty
mountains ! the mountains
of the east, the mountains
of the west ! Stand
not between us, oh thou
mighty makers of many
waters, for we would pursue a fleeting soul.
Spirits of the heavens conjure !
Spirits of the earth conjure !

He paused. Seizing the brazen rod he pointed down to to the surface of the black liquid in the dish which Walla's shapely hands still clasped, seeming to trace upon its surface certain mystic signs.

"It is finished!" he cried. "May Buddha grant the spell all potency! May the spirits of heaven and earth rest with us! Behold!"

He waved the rod aloft, its polished surface glittering as though studded with gems as it flashed before the crimson flame.

"Look! Look!" cried the Doctor. "For heaven's sake! This is several pegs above anything I ever saw!"

But I had seen without his warning cry, for my eyes were following the end of the rod which old Padma was waving with a monotonous, rotary motion just above the flame.

Slowly about the point of the rod a whitish mist had begun to gather. So thin and shadowy was it at first, that I thought I must be mistaken, that something had come before my eyes; but presently it assumed consistency, taking an oval shape and seeming to bob up and down, always following the rotary movement of the rod.

If I had not seen the same thing before, on that night when the body of the adept was brought into the inn, I might have taken it for smoke, but I had seen and I watched it with an interest most intense, suspecting what would come to pass.

Suddenly out from this luminous cloud a hand shot forth—then another, and another. In a moment there were fully a dozen; some large, some small, some the puny hands of infancy, others the wrinkled, withered hands of old age. None were white; all having the yellowish tint of the Chinese or Thibetans. Certainly as far as human vision served me, the hands were real; and, stranger still, all were *right* hands. Call them the hands of spirits, and you will have to admit twelve individual forms behind them. Padma's hands they could not have been. My attention seemed particularly drawn toward this point. I saw not a left hand among them—to that I stand ready to swear.

Only for a moment they remained visible, but in that moment the index finger of each hand was directed downward, pointing toward the dish. At last I saw them merge themselves seemingly with the cloud again—next, cloud and all had vanished, and the rod descended, until it, in turn, was pointed toward the dish.

Suddenly the flame shot higher, yet I am certain that Padma made no effort to replenish the agents which had produced it, and which ought to have been long ago con-

sumed. Higher, and higher still it rose, growing broader at the same time, until the whole room was as bright as day; and the strange part of it was, the flame now had lost some of its crimson tint and become whiter, more like an electric light.

"The dish, Wylde! For God's sake keep your eyes on the dish, man!" cried the Doctor.

My eyes fell to the surface of the black liquid; it was as smooth and motionless as glass, and, in spite of its opacity, I found, to my amazement, that I could look into it to what seemed unfathomable depths.

As I gazed no word was spoken; the Doctor's eyes were as firmly riveted as my own.

I seemed to be looking off into immeasurable space, with the sun, as a huge fiery globe hanging above me, radiating its heat and light in mighty puffs, like some breathing monster, and yet I was shivering with the very intensity of cold.

Nor did the light of the molten orb seem to illuminate. It was as though I was in darkness looking at the light. I could see all the stars of heaven shining with surpassing brilliancy—all, did I say? No; not all. The planets were wanting among the others, they were with me. I seemed to be an atom floating helplessly among them. They were all whirling forward through space with incredible rapidity; it was like gazing at a huge orrery, for each planet was of proportions so prodigious that I felt they must be seen in their proper size.

Mercury—aye, and the disputed Vulcan within its orbit—Venus, Mars, the Earth, asteroids by hundreds, mighty Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and even far off Neptune, all were there. Beyond Neptune rolled three others, enormous in their proportions; two of them had rings like Saturn, nor was there one among all the number unattended by its moon or moons.

Now suddenly all vanished, and I saw nothing but the dish, the girl, old Padma and his rod, but yet the spell remained unbroken—my gaze was still transfixed.

Again Padma moved his rod, and once more I was uplifted among the spheres.

Precisely what I had seen before I saw now, but I seemed to have assumed a different point of observation—I was between the earth and Mars!

Now I saw them!

Of course I was hypnotized—of course it was but the action of old Padma's will! Still I saw them—saw them with a distinctness fairly appaling. It was Maurice De Veber and the mysterious Mr. Mirrikh—they were floating through space, side by side.

Nor were their forms dim and shadowy as I had seen them last; on the contrary, they were clothed as black lamas, precisely as they had been clothed when they stood at the altar's foot, and they were to my vision as real and substantial as myself. It was the same Maurice—the same Mirrikh, not altered one whit.

They did not appear to see me, or to be moving of their own volition, but just carried forward like specks of floss before the summer breeze; yet their movements were not erratic, but, on the contrary, seemed to be directed toward one particular point, and that a huge globe of reddish hue, except at the poles, where I could detect vast fields of snow and ice.

Now a singular change took place, for once my gaze was fastened upon those two moving figures no effort of my own will was sufficient to detach it. Whether I would, or whether I would not, still was I forced to follow on through realms of boundless space.

Vast æons of time seemed to have been accomplished. It was as though centuries had passed since we came to Psam-dagong, and still we traveled on.

But not in vain!

Oh no! We were approaching our destination. Mars was growing nearer now.

Long ago it had ceased to look the shining object it had at first; and I knew that huge as the planets had seemed in my previous vision, their proportions were as nothing compared with the reality, for now Mars appeared larger than all rolled into one.

Clouds began to form where previously I had not perceived them, and my vision was in a measure obscured, but only for a moment; before I knew it, I had penetrated the clouds, and the roundness of the earth beneath me was lost. Now it was as I fancy an aeronaut must feel when gazing down from a height a few thousand feet.

"Maurice!" I shouted. "Oh, Maurice, it is glorious!"

He did not seem to hear me, for he never turned his head, though I could perceive by the expression on his face

that he was fully alive to the beauties of the mighty panorama which was unrolling itself to my gaze.

Mountains of vast height, stretches of dense forest, fertile plains through which rivers coursed; and then the seas, long land-locked gatherings of reddish water, extending as far as the eyes could reach; yet the prevailing color of the land was green, just as on our earth; but when wonderingly I glanced back at the clouds behind me, I saw that they, like the water, were of a dull, red color, and it flashed upon me that I had solved a mighty problem which has preplexed the astronomers of every age.

On, and still on! Nearer and nearer we approached the surface of the planet. We were descending upon a city beside which London is but an infant. I could see the people swarming through the streets. Here Mr. Mirrikh and his parti-colored face would be no novelty, for every face I saw was of the same mould, half black—half yellow; otherwise the people were like the dwellers on our earth except in the matter of dress, which was, with the men only a simple girdle of some dark cloth about the waist, while the women wore a loose gown of blue material, gathered in about the hips and thence dropping to the feet.

So intent was I in watching them that thus far I had scarcely comprehended the fact that I felt interest in other things.

Suddenly a voice seemed to speak in my ear, sounding like the voice of Mr. Mirrikh.

"Look at the city, friend Wylde! Never mind the people."

Strange that I had not thought of this before!

Still I gazed, my eyes roaming here and there, each individual structure seeming to separate from the others and impress itself on my brain with incredible rapidity.

Houses like ours they were not. For the most part they were low, square structures, ranged along broad streets, not close together, but with gardens between. I saw no building of any elegance; no vehicles, no animals of any kind; no sign of market place, churches, shops or any sort of business, Suddenly in their roaming my eyes seemed to fix themselves upon one huge building which I can only compare with the Mormon tabernacle at Salt Lake City; it was of but one story, and covered an amazing extent of ground; just a vast, oval roof of snowy whiteness, supported on tastefully carved columns, ornamented with birds, flowers and

intertwining leaves. Without exaggeration I should place the longest dimension of this enclosure at a mile.

Suddenly my gaze was drawn from it and I looked around for Maurice and his companion. To my horror I discovered that I had fallen behind.

Then I saw them settling down toward the roof of this mighty temple; for an instant they rested there, and seemed to me to vanish through it as though it were nothing, and were gone.

"Maurice! Maurice! Oh don't leave me, my friend!" I shouted, when, as with the wave of an enchanter's wand, all had vanished and I was back in the chamber, staring into the inky blackness of the bowl, with the Doctor beside me, Walla at my feet and old Padma starting up with every expression of terror overspreading his wrinkled face.

At the same instant a wild, piercing cry echoed through the enclosure, and following Padma's gaze, I saw Ni-fan-lu come dashing down the stairs.

"Dshambi-nor!" he was shouting. "Dshambi-nor!"

"Great God!" gasped the Doctor, seizing my arm with trembling hand; "this is sorcery with a vengeance! I don't know what you've been about, Wylde, but I have been to the planet Mars!"

I could not answer him. Old Padma had his ear before I was able to speak, and was uttering hurried words.

"Dshambi-nor! Dshambi-nor!" yelled Ni-fan-lu, as he came rushing up to us.

"For mercy sake, what is it?" I gasped; a vague sense of uneasiness creeping over me, for I could read something of the truth on the Doctor's face.

"Brace up, old man! Pull yourself together!" he answered hastily. "As near as I can make out we are in danger of flood. A lake has broken loose somewhere in the mountains behind the lamasery, and a few million gallons of ice water are about to be dumped upon us—that's all!"

By this time Ni-fan-lu was grovelling at Padma's feet, repeating his cry. I flung myself toward the altar and had one arm about Maurice's body as it came.

"Dshambi-nor! Dshambi-nor! Dshambi-nor!"

BOOK III.

IN UNUM DUO.

CHAPTER XVII.

A VISIT FROM MAURICE.

Ah! with what different sensations one views the mighty events of life after the lapse of years. Happenings which at the time seemed most momentous have dwindled into insignificance; seeming calamities are known to have been blessings; mighty problems, then apparently impossible of solution, are now seen as but trifles to be easily brushed away.

In some such way I look back upon my Thibetan experiences; but the time has not yet come when I can think calmly of the sight upon which my eyes rested as I gazed from the old, grey tower of the lamasery of Psam-dagong, when after that night of terror, the sunlight came at last. We were all there—all but Maurice. Where he was God alone could tell. The Doctor and I stood together looking over the parapet; old Padma paced up and down, grinding his infernal prayer wheel; Ni-fan-lu and his brother lamas were there with other prayer wheels; Ah Schow was there, taking in the situation with all the stoical indifference of his race. Walla Benjow was there also. She stood apart, white and silent, gazing upon the mighty sweep of water which surrounded the lamasery on every side. Thus it will be seen that the worst had happened and nothing remained for us but to bravely face the situation. Then, as never before, I admired the Doctor's perfect self-possession. Though I knew the man to be utterly selfish, I now leaned upon him as a tower of strength, for he could talk to these strange people and I could not.

"It is right about there the lake is, Wylde," he said, point-

ing off at a gap in the mountain range which flanked the lamasery on the north. "There are several of these lakes, Padma tells me, and it is the one nearest, which is also on the lowest level, that has broken away. Into this the upper lakes are pouring their contents steadily, and until they are drained off, the water will continue to rise. A hard frost may save us, but in the event of soft weather for the next forty-eight hours we shall be drowned out to a dead certainty. In fact there don't seem to be much help for us anyhow, as the temperature has been on the rise since midnight, and if those clouds mean anything it is rain before noon."

You see the Doctor had been questioning Padma and now drew near to tell me the result.

I saw the waters come.

We were all at the top of the tower within five minutes after the startling cry which burst from the lips of Ni-fan-lu, as he came rushing down the stairs.

When we first reached our point of observation I could see nothing which I had not seen already.

There were the mountains, there at our feet lay the snow-white plains glistening in the moonlight; above us were more stars than I ever imagined the firmament contained previous to my entrance into this desolate land; and there, half way between the zenith and the snowy peaks, was Mars.

Instinctively my gaze became riveted upon the planet. I forgot our danger; I heard not the Doctor's violent exclamations, I was deaf even to Walla's weeping; I could think only of Maurice—Maurice and the man Mirrikh—of the mighty mystery in which I had become involved.

Were they there? Were they actually there? Had I been there? Had I seen what I had seen, or was it all the outcome of the fearful strain to which my nervous system had been subjected? Perhaps it was hypnotism. Perhaps Padma to pacify me had made me see it? But no. There was the Doctor. He had seen it too.

Thus I pondered as I gazed, the voices of the lamas sounding like the confused murmur of a distant crowd, when all at once a wild shout went up.

"Look! Look!" roared the Doctor, "there it comes! There it comes at last!"

He caught my arm and pointed to the gap in the snow-clad range, which before had been but a dark blot upon the endless wall of white, and there I saw something flash; some-

thing of dazzling brilliancy upon which the moonbeams fell with silvery glare.

Then all at once a mighty roar burst upon the stillness and I saw it rise higher—higher—yet higher! A torrent was rushing through the gap into the valley below.

But the valley was invisible and as yet there was no water and a low range of foothills lay between us and the flood. Would it not be drained off by the valley? Would not the foothills form an effectual barrier of defence? I put these questions to the Doctor, and he put them to Padma, who answered—"No!"

There was no hope, it seemed; and then I learned the story of the lake, whose name, be it understood, was Dshambi; the "nor" being simply the Thibetan word for any large body of fresh water. To my surprise I found that it was not, properly speaking, a lake, but an artificial reservoir; or rather a series of reservoirs, the water being held in check by walls of masonry, the lowest one of which had now given way. These walls were built ages before, Padma said; in fact as near as I could make out he regarded the reservoirs as prehistoric, claiming for them an antiquity of more than ten thousand years. Of course, not being an archæologist I do not pretend to judge of this, and will merely state that Padma further declared that the plains below Psam-dagong were once the seat of a vast population. He told of underground ruins beneath the sand, referred to a buried city whose wants these lakes had supplied; adding that the walls had long been in a highly dangerous condition, and that for this reason Psam-dagong lost its prestige and became practically deserted, for pilgrims from the adjoining valleys feared to visit it, and without the offerings of the pious pilgrim no lamasery could live.

We continued to watch; the moments creeping slowly on until the grey of dawn began to appear in the east. All this time we could see the water rushing down the awful precipice, foaming and tearing into the valley. In that treeless region there was absolutely nothing to stay it, nothing in the least to interfere with its progress until it should reach Psam-dagong.

And it came!

At last I saw it trickling down the foothills; the valley behind was but a hollow, enclosed on all sides; this we knew must now be full. Faster and faster it came, but it came

steadily; the foothills formed a dam of perhaps half a mile in length, over which the water soon began to descend with a continuous flow, filling the ravines on either side of the table upon which the lamasery stood, until now all landmarks had vanished and we were in the midst of water, flowing past us with noiseless but steady rush. Slowly it rose, but the rise was steady; as I gazed down over the parapet of the old tower I could see that it was almost on a level with the base of the lamasery walls.

Meanwhile I had returned several times to the underground chamber to examine the condition of Maurice's body. There was no change in its appearance. I could not think otherwise than that my friend was dead.

"We shall have to make the best of it," I said, in response to the Doctor's statement of the facts of the situation. "Did you learn from Padma what we most particularly wanted to know?"

"About the means of escape?"

"Yes."

"I asked him."

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said to tell you that you need be under no alarm, that there are secrets connected with Psam-dagong of which Ni-fan-lu and the other lamas know nothing, that there is no danger whatever of our perishing in the flood."

"Well, upon my word, why couldn't you say so before! If there is hope why not let me have it? It is not kind, Doctor, to keep me in suspense at a time like this."

"Why, to tell the truth, I do not altogether believe him," said the Doctor. "I questioned the old fellow sharply, and it is my belief he's a blessed falsifier. I could not make head or tail of what he said."

"But what was the drift of it? Does he expect the water to fall?"

"No; not under any circumstances until the lakes are empty. He says the lamasery will surely be overwhelmed—perhaps swept away."

"My God! You don't mean it! Poor Maurice! What is to be done?"

"Poor Maurice! It's rather poor me, poor you! Maurice is dead. When he committed suicide—and if ever a man in this world committed suicide Maurice did it—I washed my hands of all responsibility concerning him.

This mad business has turned out exactly as I predicted."

"Stop a moment! Confine yourself to facts. Of course you had no more idea than I what turn affairs would take, you could not have had. When you told me you had been to Mars did you mean it, or——"

"Or did I lie? Spit it right out, Wylde. No; I did not lie. I meant it at the time, but it was all imagination—hypnotism if you like—infernal black magic, I call it. Of course we have no more been to Mars than we have to the moon, nor has Maurice any such existence as you and I imagined while we were in that strange condition. Maurice is dead—dead beyond recall!"

"But to get back to the subject," I answered coldly. "There is no use in discussing that matter any further."

"Returning to our muttons, then, all I've got to say is that I don't believe Padma has any more idea of the way to escape than we have. There is no boat at the lamasery, nor anything to make one out of. Besides these trees in the courtyard, I doubt if there is ten feet of lumber in the whole establishment. Even allowing there was, where could we go? We should be landed on the plains below here and left to freeze or starve to death, for we could not transport mules, of course, and no human being could travel through this country on foot as things are now; so you see—oh, Padma is speaking! He has ground his everlasting prayer to a finish. Let us see what he wants."

The announcement of the old priest was simply that breakfast would be served in half an hour, and that we should be notified when it was ready if we preferred to remain on the tower and watch the progress of the flood. As I looked I perceived that most of the lamas had left us, and that Walla also had vanished.

"Have no fears. This accident was foreseen long ago and the emergency fully provided for," the old priest said, as he left us to descend the stairs.

But the Doctor felt no such confidence, nor did I.

"I am going back to Maurice," I said, after Padma had departed. "I shall never leave him. Either some means must be found of transporting that body, or I remain behind."

"If you attempt to carry out that resolve you are a bigger fool than I think you," answered the Doctor. "Upon my word I should rather think you'd be looking after that

girl a bit. You have the field all to yourself, now that Maurice is out of the way. "

To this I made no other answer than to leave him abruptly, for aside from the coarseness of the insinuation, the Doctor's remark grated upon my nerves horribly, for a reason which I must now explain.

I no longer loved Walla—that is if I had ever loved her.

Rather should I say that the girl's face no longer produced those singular sensations with which I had for days been tormented.

Why was this?

I did not know.

The fact is I had been a puzzle to myself since the first day I met the man Mirrikh.

The change came with the return to consciousness after the real, or imaginary, trip made with Maurice and Mirrikh through the spheres. From that moment the face of Walla Benjow seemed to grow absolutely repulsive to me. I wondered how I ever could have thought it beautiful, I saw it now as I had never seen it, and could see in it nothing more than in the faces of thousands of native women upon whom I had looked since I came to Farther India. I was disgusted with myself beyond measure for having looked at it in any other light.

Was this jealousy?

Was it because Walla in that last awful moment before Maurice took the fatal step declared her love for my friend?

Then I was foolish enough, ignorant enough of the heart's most holy affection, to believe this?

Ah! I do not think so now.

But a sense of duty prompted me to seek the girl and give her such hopeful assurances as I could. I sought her in vain, however, nor did I see Walla again until after breakfast, which was served to the Doctor and myself alone, as usual, Padma having come for me in the vault to which I had returned, insisting by signs in his gentle way that I must eat.

During the meal I controlled my anxiety as best I could, and we discussed the situation in all its bearings.

We could see no hope outside of Padma.

After breakfast we ascended to the top of the tower again.

The water was now approaching the lamasery walls, with

a much higher temperature and every appearance of rain.

Meanwhile the lamas seemed to have recovered from their fright and were hurrying hither and thither with great bags on their backs, popping in at one door and out at another. They were carrying the treasures of the lamasery into an underground vault, with the hope that after the flood subsided they could return and claim them. Already the temple was stripped of its magnificance. I had seen all this going on when last I descended to the chamber where the body of my poor friend lay.

"I think I shall stay here and smoke a pipe," said the Doctor. "I wish to watch the progress of this affair, beside which I have an appointment with Padma. He promised to return in an hour and fully explain the means by which we are to escape."

"Stay by all means," I replied. "I shall descend again and try to find Walla. It is very singular what has become of the girl."

We had inquired for her, of course, but could get no satisfaction; before ascending the tower stairs I dispatched Ah Schow to look her up, and now, when I came out into the courtyard, I saw her standing beneath the big tree with a face so white that my heart melted. I hurried forward and seized her hand.

"So you have come at last!" I exclaimed. "Where have you been? We have looked everywhere for you."

She stared dully.

"I have been with him," she answered. "I saw you, but you did not see me."

"Do you mean with Maurice? Surely you were not in the underground chamber?"

"Yes."

"But where?"

"I was on the other side of the altar, upon the floor. Oh, my friend, tell me—what does it all mean?"

"Why, don't you comprehend it yet?" I said rather testily. "There is a flood; the water——"

"Of course I understand that. It is not of that I am speaking, I mean about him."

"Maurice?"

"Yes. Tell me—why did they kill him? I cannot understand."

How dull she seemed. How strangely she spoke. As if

she did not know! I said as much, and in no very pleasant manner either, but she did not seem to understand even yet.

"Of all that happened in that vault I remember nothing," she said. "They have done something to me—what is it? My head don't seem to be right."

I questioned her further. To me it seemed incredible that she should forget her mad rush toward Maurice, her earnest pleading that he should not take the fatal step.

But she assured me that she did not remember, nor could she account for her time between our arrival at the lamasery and the moment I saw her in the corner of the underground chamber. Her mind seemed to be in a most extraordinary condition. The more I questioned her, the more confused she became.

Then suddenly she broke out with a low, wailing cry and began lamenting Maurice.

She seemed to think they had killed him, that they had offered him up as a sacrifice. In this strange mood she showed an intensity of passion of which I had not believed her capable, and confessed her love for Maurice in the most emphatic terms.

Altogether our interview was a most peculiar one, and decidedly painful for me, for I was utterly at a loss to make her comprehend the situation.

"Kill me! Kill me, Mr. Wylde! Let me go to him!" she wailed. "I loved him! Oh, how I loved him! He did not know it! His eyes were never for me; but you—oh, how I hated you! I—ah God! What is this?"

Suddenly clapping both hands about her head Walla stood before me reeling like a person intoxicated; her eyes closed, the lids began to twitch violently, her face grew whiter still.

Suddenly this paroxysm seemed to pass, and her hands fell to her sides, and for some minutes, she remained as white and rigid as a standing corpse.

Now it need scarcely be said that I was much disturbed by all this, but when I tried to speak, something seemed to have palsied my tongue.

Suddenly the expression of her face changed, and to my amazement I felt rushing upon me all that love for this strange creature which I had previously experienced. I could have caught her in my arms, but she waved me back and spoke in tones wholly unlike her own.

"Not now my beloved; not now mine other self! The veil between the world of matter and the world of spirit still separates us. Have patience, George. Yet a little while and you will have crossed the border. Then to all eternity shall we live as one!"

What was this?

What did it mean?

Every drop of blood in my veins seemed suddenly to have been transformed to liquid fire.

Love!

I swear that no man ever experienced such love as I felt for Walla Benjow then, and yet I could not even bear to think of my former folly ten minutes before.

"Walla! Oh Walla!" I breathed. "What is this? What spell is it that you have the power to cast over me? Tell me—"

"Stay!" she murmured. "It is time that you knew something of the truth. I am not Walla Benjow. This land is not as your land. There the power, yes the very existence of such as I is denied. George Wylde, I am a spirit. I hold this woman in control. It is I you have loved—not Walla. To you she is nothing, but I am your soul's companion. Have no fear. This trial will pass. Now I must leave you, for your friend would speak."

It was a hard blow to my scepticism, yet I was not ignorant of the claims of a class of persons whom, until now, I had looked upon as arrant charlatans. I allude, of course, to the trance mediums of modern Spiritualism. I had never seen any of their work, but I had read of it, and now the recollection of what I had read recurred to my mind.

Then I saw Walla's face change again—saw a shudder pass through her frame—was thanking my stars that the Doctor was not present, when suddenly I was startled by hearing her exclaim in a totally different voice with much more of the masculine about it:

"Hello, George!"

I started back as though stung.

It was not Maurice's voice, that is certain; yet there was something about it which so strangely resembled his voice as to be positively startling.

I thought of Maurice on the instant, although I positively declare that when "my friend" was alluded to a moment previous it never entered my mind that it bore reference to him.

"Don't you know me?" asked the voice. "I want you to understand, old fellow, that I still live."

"Maurice?" I gasped.

"Yes, Maurice."

"For Heaven's sake——"

"No. Not for heaven's sake, for your sake! It is an awful bother for me to do this, but I am partly selfish in it, and Mirrikh is helping me out. I want to say two things to you, George, and I want you to understand that it is Maurice De Veber, and no one else, who talks to you—do you hear?"

"Say on! I hear, but I think I'm going mad!"

"Mad! Not a bit of it! You are the same clear headed fellow you always were; you are simply dealing with forces and conditions which you don't understand—that is all."

"And you?"

"I am right here with you."

"I cannot believe it."

"Believe it or not it is a fact, George; but no more. I cannot hold this medium any longer without injuring her. What I want to say is this: Watch my body, for as sure as there is a God in heaven I shall return to you. Beware of the Doctor. He will play you false."

"Maurice! "Maurice!" I cried. "You have my promise. So long as your body remains as it is, so long will I guard it. Maurice! Speak again! Tell me——"

I stopped abruptly.

Again the shudder passed over Walla; her eyes opened; she stood there blinking stupidly.

"What—what is the matter?" she gasped. "What have you been doing to me, Mr. Wylde?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

GONE—WHERE?

DING, dong! Ding, dong! Ding, dong!

The lamasery bell was tolling—tolling the funeral knell of a shrine which for all I know stood as we see it now in the day's of Gladstone's *Juventus Mundi;* for the world when young in Europe was very old in Asia. God alone

could tell if the tottering old structure would endure the strain to which it was about to be subjected.

Ding, dong! Ding, dong! Ding, dong!

I could think only of the big bell at the gate of Greenwood cemetery, tolling as it tolled on that chill October day when I consigned my baby boy to the dust.

Ding, dong! Ding, dong! Ding, dong!

I could see my wife weeping and protesting that she wanted to die also; begging me to bury her along with the child, when at that very time she——

Ding, dong! Ding, dong! Ding, dong!

Ring out, old bell! Ring out your loudest peal and drown these memories forever! If the teachings of this strange land are truth, then may they indeed be forgotten; for not only does the boy still live, but there awaits me in that land, where we know each other as we are, one whose heart will beat in perfect accord with my heart's beatings: whose soul shall know no thought, no longing that is not in harmony with my own!

Ding, dong! Ding, dong! Ding, dong!

Still the bell kept tolling. Why, I did not know; but this much was certain—our time at Psam-dagong was growing short, for the waters had risen almost to the top of the lamasery wall and the rain was falling in torrents.

"Come, George," said the Doctor, calling me from the temple doorway. "Come. Padma wants you; he is going to show us the road by which we are to escape!"

The sound of the Doctor's voice banished the strange spell which had come upon me. At the same moment the bell upon which Ni-fan-lu had been banging away for more than an hour suddenly ceased to toll. I hurried across the courtyard to the temple door.

It was late in the afternoon—the afternoon following the bursting of the Dshambi-nor. Long ago Walla and I had parted, she to crouch before the altar where lay Maurice's body, I to wander hither and thither, pondering, doubting, wondering, fearing! God knows I could make nothing of it. The only wonder is I did not go raving mad.

Now I would say to myself that I *was* mad; that Maurice was dead; that the proper thing for me was to immolate myself on that same altar and make an end of it all. Again I was in reverie, and in fancy saw myself floating through the spheres, seeking the voice which through Walla's lips

had spoken those words of cheer. Still again I was execrating Walla for her subtle power of fascination, calling her a fraud and cursing myself for a fool. But I had not told the Doctor what happened in the courtyard beneath the big tree, and I did not tell him now as I followed him into the temple, where we found old Padma waiting for us before the big Buddha, looking as patriarchal and serene as ever.

With his usual self-assurance Philpot began rattling away, assuming that patronizing manner which I had grown to dislike so much.

"Look here, George, I've been having a long talk with Padma," he said as we passed through the temple. "As near as I can understand, this whole region is undermined with vast caverns; we are to pass through these caverns by some means which I can't make out and are to fetch up at another lamasery close to Lh'asa. You see I've been busy while you've been moping about."

"It makes no difference to me where we go," I replied, "providing we take Maurice's body with us. Without that I shall not stir."

"Oh that will be all right. I spoke to Padma, and he seemed surprised that there should be any question about it. If it is any comfort to you to know it, he scouts the idea of Maurice being dead; says he is as sure to come back as the sun is to rise."

"I shall fulfill my promise in any event," I replied. "So long as Maurice's body remains as those other bodies are down there, I shall never leave it, even if it costs me my life."

"Well, by Jove! You're a friend worth having; but—wait! Padma wants to speak."

What was the old priest saying? I would have given anything to have been able to understand.

As it was I could only follow them down into the underground chamber again, where we found Walla beside Maurice, a sight which aroused feelings amounting almost to jealous hatred within me. She could stay there where I felt that I ought to stay; yet to save me I could not do it, for to stand gazing at those still, white features drove me almost mad.

There was no change in the appearance of the face. I took one good look at it as I passed the altar, following Padma over to the side of the chamber opposite to the stone drawers containing the alleged planetary corpses.

Still talking to the Doctor, in his slow, mild fashion, Padma drew from beneath his robe a huge bronze key which he proceeded to fit into a hole in the stone. Turning this he gave the wall a push and a narrow section of the stone moved back revealing a dark opening behind. He caught up a lamp which he had placed behind him on the floor, flashed it into the opening and I saw, extending down from it, a broad sheet of polished brass, pitched at a sharp angle, above which was a wheel and a rope. I could not imagine what all this meant until the Doctor began to explain.

"Padma says that this inclined plane leads into another cavern miles and miles away, Wylde," he said hurriedly. "There is a car of some sort attached to the rope and we are to be let down in it, From the cavern to Lh'asa the distance is short and the way easy. We are to leave at midnight, providing the water holds off that long. By that time they will have all the treasures of the lamasery safely stored away. See! He is pulling the car up now."

Padma had seized the rope and was pulling it over the wheel. I perceived at once that it was old and worn and many of the strands had parted. I looked at the priest's face and saw the expression of calm serenity leave it and something like fear assume its place. Suddenly he ceased to pull and began talking hurriedly with the Doctor who gave one sharp exclamation and turned to me, his countenance as pale as death.

"Bad news, George! The rope is all worn out. It hasn't been used in many years and can't possibly take the car down more than once or twice."

"Then our fate depends upon the size of the car?"

"Precisely."

"Ask him how big it is? Let us know the worst!"

He turned to Padma and put the question, but instead of replying the priest began tugging at the rope again. In a moment a rumbling sound was heard and I saw a small box-like arrangement come into view; it rested close down upon the brass and seemed to run upon rollers which were invisible. I have neglected to mention that there was a bronze guard about six inches high on either side of the incline to prevent the car from running off.

"By Jove! We're fixed now!" cried the Doctor. "It's barely big enough for two!"

We knew the worst in a moment.

Flashing his light upward at the wheel, Padma, having first made the rope fast to a hook, climbed into the car and began a careful examination.

The Doctor was very uneasy.

"George, it's my opinion the old guy means to go down and save himself," he whispered. "Let's grab him and you and I go. He told me just how to manage the machine and it's as easy as rolling off a log."

"No, no! There are other lives to be saved besides our own."

"To the dogs with the others! What are we to do?"

"But how about Maurice?"

"Maurice is dead. We have ourselves to think of. We can't be sacrified for a corpse."

"Unless Maurice's body leaves this place I remain and take my chances," I said coldly.

"But this is madness! A man's life is all he has in this world, and——"

"And I am beginning to believe in the existence of another where for our deeds, good or evil, we shall be held in strict account.

"Bah! Leave preaching to me; it's my business, not yours! We can easily overcome the old fellow and take our chances in the car. I tell you the lamasery is doomed! There is no earthly show for us unless we do it. Have common sense and listen to me. If you don't want to attack Padma now, we can hang around here and do it later on."

"Neither sooner or later, without Maurice."

"But we cannot take the body. There is barely room for you and me to crowd into the car."

Here we were interrupted by Padma, who stepped out of the car and began speaking again. His face had assumed its wonted expression of calmness, yet when the Doctor came to translate I found that the situation was fully as critical as he had feared.

He declared that there was very little chance of the rope taking the car safely even one trip down into the cavern, but he calmly assured the Doctor that this need not matter, for there still existed another means of escape.

At this point the Doctor turned to listen again. For some moments Padma spoke earnestly and then left us, ascending the stairs. Not until the sound of his footsteps

died away did the Doctor deign to answer me, although I had twice addressed him, begging to know what the priest had said.

"Do you want to know?" he exclaimed, turning suddenly upon me, and speaking very rapidly. "He tells me that this other way lies through the cavern beneath the temple, where the fatal gas is stored. He says that it was built ages ago before the gas came and abandoned because it came; he says all we've got to do is to inhale the gas, and go at lightning speed by way of the spirit world, sending our bodies down through the cavern and taking them up again at the other end of the route. I tell you, Wylde, it's all balderdash. The fellow is a sly old rascal. He is trying to throw us off the scent and means to go by the car himself, leaving us to be drowned out here when the water comes. Now then, here's the last call. Will you go with me, or will you not?"

"Not without Maurice."

"Fool!"

"Put it as you will."

"I put it as it is. Think twice."

"No! Doctor beware! No good can come of so selfish a proceeding. Remember that the rope may hold out. Would you deprive these other poor wretches of their chance of life?"

"Rubbish! What are they to me? Let them go the other way if they want to, I—hark! What was that? A cry above! By the eternal! I believe the water has come."

We hurried up into the temple, for the Doctor suddenly ceased his argument.

It was as he had feared.

When we reached the courtyard we found the lamas standing in the pouring rain, huddled together beneath the big tree, their eyes fixed upon the wall surrounding the lamasery, over which the water was beginning to come in little splashes here and there.

"Better get your grip, George!" cried the Doctor." If we do escape we shall need it. Go now and I will have a look over the wall. I shall do nothing until you return."

There was reason in his suggestion, and relying upon his promise I hurried into the lamasery. Not only did I want to save something of my belongings if possible, but I was

anxious to find Ah Schow and give him warning, for I could see nothing of the faithful fellow in the yard.

I was gone perhaps ten minutes; time for the most part spent in search of the Chinaman, whom I found at last in the big room where our meals had been served. Hastily I told him of the danger and together we returned to the yard.

Here the situation had changed but little, except that instead of coming by splashes the water was now running over the wall in places in steady streams.

But where was the Doctor?

To my surprise I could see nothing of him, nor was old Padma visible. Beneath the big tree the lamas stood in silence, showing not the slightest emotion, each grinding away at his own private prayer wheel, the united clicks of the different wheels making the most infernal din. At once the truth flashed upon me. The Doctor had availed himself of my absence to carry his purpose into effect.

I knew it—I was sure of it—I felt as certain of it as though I had seen him go.

Then I felt furious with the fellow, but now as I look back upon that trying hour, I do not know that I so much blame him.

As he viewed the situation it was a question of life or death. He had given me my chance—I had refused to take it—he disposed of me for the moment to save further argument and had started on that strange journey alone.

Without pausing an instant I rushed into the temple, bounded around the big Buddha and down the stone stairs.

How deathly still the chamber was! How ghastly looked poor Maurice's face as I flew past the altar beside which Walla, with bowed head still crouched, as white and silent as Maurice himself.

I rushed across to the stone door which still stood open. It was as I had supposed. The car was no longer there.

"Selfish pig!" I burst out. "If he has gone to his death he richly deserves it, yet upon my word I would scarcely have had the courage—merciful God!"

You see I caught up the lamp as I approached the opening, and flashing it in saw that no more of the rope was visible than a dangling end, with broken strands hanging down over the wheel.

Taking advantage of my absence the Doctor had gone—gone where?

CHAPTER XIX.

I INHALE THE FATAL GAS.

IT was the sound of many footsteps which recalled me to myself, for the shock of that broken rope proved almost too much for my already overstrained nerves. Turning I beheld the lamas of Psam-dagong approaching in solemn procession with Padma at their head, while Ah Schow, carrying my neglected grip, brought up the rear, looking as stoical and indifferent as though nothing unusual had occurred.

If his Joss wanted Ah Schow, his Joss would take him; if not he would escape even though the world were in flames.

Such was our Chinaman's way of looking at the matter, and it was a highly comforting one—there is no doubt about that.

I pulled myself together as best I could, and advancing to meet them pointed toward the entrance to that strange incline, at the same time calling to Ah Schow to come forward and act as interpreter between Padma and myself.

But there was no excitement about the matter.

Padma seemed to view the Doctor's act as one of simple folly. Fortunately for me I found no difficulty in talking to him through Ah Schow.

"We could not have gone by the car in any event, my son." he said. "This affair has all been settled. We go by the way of the world of spirit. By his selfishness your friend has doubtless gone to his death, while we most surely shall be saved."

"Is there no chance that he still lives?" I asked.

"How can I tell? I have not passed over that road for many years. Since the days of my boyhood it has been against the orders of our spiritual master, the most holy Tale Lama, that this road should be used except in such an emergency as this. I know not where the rope parted or how; but let us not discuss the matter further. What is done is done. We have now to think ourselves. Watch well and follow us in what we are about to do, and by Bud-

dha's grace, not a hair of your head shall be harmed."

"And my friend here?" I asked, waving my hand toward the altar.

He thought that I referred to Walla and replied that she should be cared for equally with myself; when I made him understand that it was Maurice, he actually smiled.

"Why need you concern yourself about him? Already his soul is separated from the material covering. We have but to send that down by the way our bodies are to go. He will never know until it pleases Buddha to send him back to the material again."

He ceased to address me with this, and out came those infernal prayer wheels again and the grinding of a petition, of a quarter of an hour's length began.

While this was in progress I made my last visit to the courtyard. Being in Rome I resolved to do precisely as the Romans did, but I wanted one more look at daylight—moreover I was curiously anxious to know how the water stood.

When I reached the temple I found the floor covered to the depth of half an inch.

Now the temple floor was raised about three feet above the yard level, and the platform behind the statue where the stairs began, perhaps as much more.

I waded through the icy water, and gaining the door, peered out into the courtyard.

There was absolutely no hope. The water was now pouring over the wall on all sides. It would have taken a boat to reach the big tree.

Back in the underground chamber again, I placed myself beside Maurice and waited for the clicking prayer wheels to cease, feeling a sense of calm assurance difficult to explain.

Just then Walla aroused from her lethargy, and tottering to her feet questioned me as to the situation, which I explained as well as I could.

She said but little; seeming to take it for granted that nothing could be done to change matters.

"Do they take him?" she asked after a moment.

"Yes."

"Then I shall go too."

"You will have to go or drown."

She smiled sadly.

"If I thought he would never return I should stay and drown."

"You love him so?"

"I love him—yes. I never knew what it was to love till now. I could die for his sake. I can live and suffer if it will help to bring him back."

"Poor child! He will have no thought of you even should he return."

She shot toward me a glance so malignant that I was amazed. I should have carried the discussion further, but just then the prayer wheels ceased their click. Padma bent down about ten feet away from the altar, and I saw a large trap door raised.

I would have pressed forward to see what this meant, but Padma's eyes caught my movement and he waved me back; the lamas silently formed themselves into a half circle about the altar and stood like so many statues, while the priest, putting a small paper roll into his wheel, ground the prayer to a finish, wasting five precious seconds, for it was but a question of a very short time now when the water must come pouring down the stone steps.

Presently the prayer wheel stopped whirling, and a box containing "joss sticks" was passed around.

Each lama shook out the sticks, seized the one which fell nearest the altar and carefully examined the characters printed upon it. I wondered what they were doing and beckoned Ah Schow to approach.

"Dat for las' man," explained our cook. "He no can go—he die."

Suddenly a shout went up and I saw a young lama rise from the floor with face as white as death. He did not speak, however, nor did any of his companions. He had drawn the fatal character, whatever it might have been, and I must do the fellow justice and say that he submitted like a true man.

Padma now called me and pointed into the open trap. There was no car here, nothing but a square, inclined box, or shute, made of hard-baked clay, polished on the bottom and sides as smooth as glass.

"This my son," explained the priest, Ah Schow interpreting, "was constructed ages before the lamasery was built; for know that this shrine stands upon the site of one almost as old as the world itself. It leads to the cavern, passing

directly through that other cavern where lurks the gas. Since your friend has cut off the other road, this is our only hope. We shall inhale the gas one by one, sending the bodies through this opening. Is it your wish to accompany us, or do you fear?"

"I fear, but I shall go," I answered. "That is providing my friend——"

"That is already settled, my son. Explain to the sister."

"I have explained."

"And your servant?"

"Understands as well as I have the power to make him; but tell me father, the lama who drew the fatal lot—must he die?"

"He must, my son. Who is to put his body into the opening? He cannot do it himself after inhaling the gas."

"Cannot your spirit friends assist?"

The priest shook his head.

"Under certain circumstances that might be done, but it needs a harmony of thought, a calmness of soul, to enable them to take on the power which we are not able to furnish under such circumstances as these."

"One question more—the bodies in the boxes? Those planetary corpses—are they to be left behind?"

"We cannot take them. It is impossible. We have scarcely time to save ourselves."

"Then souls from the planets can never visit this earth again?"

"Never in these bodies, my son. Psam-dagong is doomed."

"And there is no other channel of communication?"

"None that I am aware of; none known to the followers of Buddha. I cannot answer for the rest of the world. But time presses. A beginning must be made."

He ceased to speak, and approaching the altar opened the little door in its side and arranged the golden tube as it had been before.

"Ni-fan-lu!" he called.

Ni-fan-lu stepped forward. His face was pale, but he was entirely calm.

Padma in loud and distinct tones spoke a few hurried words, whereupon the lamas all bowed profoundly, their hands crossed upon their breasts. He then laid his own hand upon the plug and Ni-fan-lu bent down, fixed his

mouth to the tube, and with long, deep inhalations drew in the gas.

Suddenly he straightened up—I wondered how he knew when to do it—and Padma quickly restored the plug.

With that strange sense of quiescence still upon me, I watched the face of the young lama and saw pass over it the same change of expression which I had noted upon the face of Mr. Mirrikh and Maurice. Suddenly he reeled, pressed his hand to his heart, staggered back a step or two, and sank to the floor.

Again Padma spoke.

Instantly two lamas seized Ni-fan-lu and carrying him to the open trap thrust him down, head first, into the shute.

I darted forward and saw the body disappear like a flash. I knew then what my fate was to be, and yet to save me I could not stir up the slightest feeling of fear.

"We will now send down the body of your friend," said Padma. "By the time it has made the journey Ni-fan-lu will be ready to receive it, for I have instructed him to take on his material body instantly, and not wander away into the spirit world."

I simply bowed assent, for I was fully prepared for this; but Walla, the instant the lamas approached the altar, gave a fearful shriek and flung herself across poor Maurice.

"Come! Come!" I exclaimed. "We cannot have this. Calm yourself! It must be done."

But she only screamed the louder, and I was wondering what means could be taken to quiet her, for she struck at the lamas with her clenched fists, and even tried to bite one of them, when suddenly Padma, who had slipped around in front of the altar, began making passes about her head.

Poor Walla!

It was but an instant before she was in the clutches of the hypnotic spell. Her struggles ceased; she straightened up and fixed her eyes on Padma, wholly subject to his will.

"We will send her first," said the priest. "Since she fancies she loves him let her be there to receive his body."

He addressed a few hurried words to Walla who immediately bent down over the golden tube.

Padma was already there to attend to her. The plug was removed and the gas inhaled. In this case there was not even a momentary resistance. Walla sank to the floor and was instantly seized. They tied a cord about her skirts to

keep them close, and without emotion I stood calmly by and saw the girl whom but yesterday I thought I loved, thrust headlong down into those unknown depths.

Positively I began to be alarmed at myself my sensibilities had become so dulled; but just as I was giving way to these feelings, it seemed to me that a hand was pressed against my forehead with feathery lightness, while a voice whispered:

"George, my boy, be brave—be calm. I am with you. Do not fear."

Was it imagination, or was it real?

Was it all an emanation from my own mind and memory, or was it actually the hand of some bright spirit hovering near?

I do not know any better now than I knew then; but this much I do know, the voice was the voice of my mother, and the sense of her dear presence so strong that her face seemed somehow to mix itself up with the face of Walla as they took her away. I can no more explain this than I can explain Maurice's voice and Maurice's individuality speaking through the girl's lips. All I can say is that if Walla was a mystery in those trying hours, I was rapidly becoming a greater mystery to myself.

Now all this came to me and was gone in a minute; the next and the lamas were at the altar working over Maurice's body.

I did not attempt to interfere; nor, though I felt deeply moved to do it, could I make any demonstration over the body. Somehow it no longer seemed as if this was Maurice. As the lamas bore it to the trap I found myself muttering: "Maurice is not here! Maurice is not here! Maurice is in Mars!" And I kept saying it over and over again, unable to check myself, until suddenly the lamas at the trap rose up and I knew that Maurice's bodily form had followed the ones which had gone before.

I sprang to the trap furious with myself for not having been there to see it go; amazed that I could have stood aside mumbling like a parrot while they took my friend away. Padma's hand was on my arm before I reached it, however, and his gentle voice calmed my excitement.

"No, my son do not look," he said; "it will only alarm you and can do no good. By this time Ni-fan-lu is surely ready to receive you. Let me advise you to make the descent next. It will be better so."

But I hesitated and drew back.

"As you will," said the venerable Buddhist with calm indifference; "but before you decide, look behind—I am not selfish in thus urging—look at the stairs."

I turned and saw how wisely he had spoken. There was a tiny stream trickling over the edge of the topmost step, spattering in silvery drops upon the stone floor below.

"The water!" I exclaimed. "It has come!"

"Even so, my son! It is as you say—the water has come!"

Fancy Ah Schow standing between us, interpreting with no more show of emotion than a post! In a Chinaman we call this blind belief in fatality? Perhaps it is; but were an Englishman, a Frenchman, aye, or an American, to do the same, he would lay claim to courage with a mighty deal of clatter, no matter what his private belief regarding a future state might be.

"Spiritual father!" I cried, bestowing upon the old lama the title by which his flock invariably addressed him," let me ask you, what must be the nature of my thoughts during the strange journey I am about to make? Would it not be better for you to go first that your assistance might be given to the wandering souls seeking their bodies at the other end of the passage? How am I to find my way?"

"My son, you have no need of my assistance," he answered. "Nor will I leave this place until the last of my lamas has departed save the one whom Buddha has called unto himself. If death comes to me, it will be welcome. As for your other question, know that where your thoughts are there your spiritual presence must ever be. So long as the life cord is unbroken your soul must seek your material body when you will it to do so. Beware then lest you will it too soon, for I know not what breaks time may have made in the passage; should you return and inhale an over-supply of the gas all the power of your will could not preserve you from death. Then indeed would the cord be broken and you enter the realm of spirit to remain until the will of Buddha calls you to earth again."

"But how shall I know? What sense will tell me of the proper time?"

"Why, my son, your senses remain with you—not an atom of your personality is lost. You can, if you wish, follow your body every inch of the way. There will be no such difficulties as you fear."

"But Walla—the girl—her senses are no longer in her control! What of her?"

"They are in mine, my son; and at the proper moment I shall restore them to her. She will safely reach her journey's end."

"But the distance—what is it?"

"It is great. I cannot express it so that you will understand. It is many, many miles, as you would say."

"Will she have reached the end of her journey before you enter the passage?"

"You mean before my body enters? Possibly not; but that will make no difference. My body is not myself. Once my spirit is unchained it can operate far more readily than at present. But time presses; see, the water stream grows larger. Either you must go or another—choose!"

"I will go," I replied boldly. "My determination is taken. Even though there were no danger I would still go, I cannot remain here alone."

"Well spoken, my son. The danger, however, all lies in remaining. Come forward, bend before the tube and put your lips upon it. Fix your mind upon your body; will to remain near it and all the powers of heaven and earth cannot keep you from it, for the will of man is all-powerful, subject only to the will of the Supreme."

The time had clearly come and I hesitated no longer.

Bending down over the golden tube I fixed my mouth upon it the instant Padma pulled out the plug.

All sense of fear seemed to have left me. As Mr. Mirrikh, Maurice and Ni-fan-lu had done before me, I drew in the fatal gas and straightened up.

The deed was done!

CHAPTER XX.

MY SECOND JOURNEY TO MARS.

WAS there something wrong?

Was I alone, of all those who had inhaled the gas before me, proof against its powers?

I thought so then.

Thus far I had experienced absolutely no change in my sensations.

I turned to Ah Schow and told him to ask Padma what the matter was; but, strange to say, Ah Schow did not seem to hear.

I spoke louder—louder still—I shouted. It had no effect whatever upon my servant.

They stood there looking at me; and then, to my utter amazement, I was looking at myself. There I was lying upon the stone floor beside the altar, in the precise spot where Maurice had lain before me. I saw the two lamas approach, lift me up and carry me to the trap. I saw them put me head first into the shute; I saw myself disappear like a flash. And yet I solemnly affirm that so far as my own consciousness went, I was precisely the same George Wylde I had been before.

I was a man; a living man, with every atom of my personality perfect; every member of my body, every stitch of my clothing intact; yet when I spoke, no one heard; when I moved about I seemed to pass directly through the forms around me. Already I had forgotten Padma's injunction. I had *not* fixed my thoughts upon my body. How could I be expected to do so when to me it seemed as though I were in my body still?

My first thought after the disappearance of my body, was one of curiosity to know how the flood was progressing. I thought of the big tree in the courtyard beneath which I had passed through that strange experience with Walla, and instantly I was there.

Now for a moment terror seized me, for the courtyard was a lake; the water was pouring over the wall in torrents. But I soon perceived that I was no longer as I had been. I seemed to float above the water, and when I thought wonderingly of what was beyond the wall, I rose higher. I could look over it, and my eyes rested upon a vast sea, extending in every direction.

"Will it never end?" I thought. "Is there more still to come? What is its source? Has it not been exhausted yet? Would that I were at this wonderful Dshambi-nor."

Suddenly I seemed to shoot through the air with incredible swiftness, and before I could at all realize the situation, I was approaching those distant mountain peaks which had seemed so far away. The next I knew I was among them,

hovering above a lake into which water was pouring from another lake at a higher level. At the outer edge of this upper lake, between two precipices, I perceived a wall made up of rough stones, in the middle of which was a yawning gap with the water rushing through. Then I comprehended exactly what had occurred.

I looked down into the water. It formed no obstacle to my vision. I could see that the bottom of the lake was strewn all over with small objects made to represent the human head in profile. There were thousands upon thousands of them. Many were of gold, others of a black, dirty substance, which I instantly knew had once been glittering silver, now changed by the action of the water; but by far the largest number were of stone.

"What are these? How came they here?" I asked myself.

The answer came to me, not in words, but by an inward consciousness which it seemed impossible to question, and I knew that they were the offerings of an ancient race which had vanished thousands upon thousands of years before many of our western thinkers are willing to admit the earth existed; cast into the lake to propitiate the spirit believed to hold its waters in check. I knew also, by the same mysterious sense, that it was this race which had built the dam, the vaults beneath the lamasery and the strange shute into which I had seen my body go.

Still thinking of these things, I suddenly found myself in motion again, and before I knew it was back in the courtyard; passing directly through the temple wall, which offered no more resistance than so much air; I was in the underground chamber once more.

Here matters had changed. The water lay six inches deep upon the floor, and Padma was in the act of inhaling the gas. He was alone save for the lama upon whom the lot had fallen. Suddenly I saw his body sink into this man's arms and another Padma rise beside it, appearing as a whitish cloud emanating from the region of the spleen, but quickly taking on the old lama's familiar form and floating away.

I watched him as he vanished through the solid walls of the chamber and then turned to look at what was left behind.

The lama was dragging the body towards the trap into which the water was now pouring in a steady stream. He

had tied a cloth tightly over the mouth and nostrils; in another instant he threw it down and it was gone.

Breathlessly I watched him, for I knew that his time had come. It did not seem to disturb him, however. He closed the trap and wading to the altar removed the plug from the golden tube and inhaled the gas, restoring the plug before he raised himself again. Once more that mysterious process was repeated. The body of the lama sank to the floor with a splash, but his spirit—I questioned these mighty facts no longer—rose up and soared away, leaving me the sole occupant of that gloomy vault.

Now one might reasonably suppose that by this time I would have found leisure to think of my own body, but I had not done so yet. The fact is I was enjoying a delicious sense of freedom—a sensation too delicious to be disturbed.

I thought, instead, of Maurice. I desired to see him, to speak to him, to know where he was and what he was about.

Then like a flash that chamber vanished and I was repeating my former experience—I was floating among the spheres.

Sun, moon and stars innumerable were all about me, each in its proper form and place; each following its own proper motion; all of which I was, as before, in some measure able to grasp.

Was I moving?

I certainly was and with incredible rapidity; yet as I directed my eyes toward Mars, which hovered a dull, reddish globe of light above me, it seemed at a distance vast beyond all computation. It was only when I looked beyond it and caught sight of Orion and great Sirius that I comprehended something of the immensity of space. Then Mars seemed so near that I felt I had only to reach out my hand and touch it, while æons of time lay between myself and the Dog Star. My brain reeled—I was grappling with problems comprehensible only to the Divine essence—the Lord, God Almighty, who holds countless suns and worlds without end in the hollow of his hand.

Then a voice spoke.

"Beware, George! Fix your thoughts upon your friends, lest while contemplating mysteries too deep for your natural mind, you sever the life cord and return to your proper sphere of usefulness no more!"

Now may God keep the memory of what I beheld at that instant ever green!

But why do I say it? There can be no lapse of time so great, no depth of space so vast, as to prevent me, when the time comes that this mortal body of mine is laid down to dust, from seeking out that face!

Beside me floated a female form beautiful beyond all telling, clothed in loose garments of fleecy whiteness; her face close to my face, her eyes looking into my eyes, her thoughts so intertwined with my thoughts that I knew them and knew that she knew mine.

"Who are you—some bright spirit sent to guide me?" I asked, with a strange inward speech of which I can give no proper description, except to say that I gave utterance to no audible sounds.

Nor were such necessary. Not only did she understand me, but I had as little difficulty with her answer. After a second it was as though we were talking as mortals talk, yet this I knew was not actually the case.

"I am your soul's mate to all eternity, George," she said. "For many years I have been with you in spirit. I laid down the material when you were but a child."

"You are then a spirit?"

"I am. It was I who spoke with you in the courtyard through the mediumship of the girl Walla."

"Then it was true?"

"Not only true, but more than that. Since your first meeting with that girl I have been able, in a sense, to make you feel my presence. It was I who looked at you out of her eyes, George, when you thought you loved her; when I ceased to look, your love was transformed almost to hatred. These, however, are things which you cannot comprehend."

"So little do I comprehend that though I accept them as facts now, I shall reject and doubt upon my return to earth."

"It is so. Yet they will leave their impressions. George, you are mine, I am yours. No power can keep us apart in eternity; though God alone knows when our souls shall be united in the realm of spirit. To me, however, this matters little, for to me as a spirit, time has no existence, but to you —for you can now never forget me—the time may seem long."

"But how—by what power did you speak to me through the lips of the girl?"

"By the power of mind over mind. As a hypnotizer handles his lucide, so I handled Walla. Her consciousness was for the time obliterated. It was I who spoke."

"Incomprehensible; but now I cannot doubt. Let us change the subject. Will you tell me your name?"

"Not now—it is not permitted—call me Hope."

"Hope of the hour when I shall see you always?"

"That is it. You recognize my power over you, I perceive."

"I feel as I never felt before in the presence of anyone, man or woman. It is not love as I have experienced love. It is rather a sense of completeness. I feel as if before I saw you I was but a fragment. I feel——"

"Stay! You do not know yet the true conjugal feeling."

"I do not, I admit it. My wife——"

"Your wife! Do not use the word. I am your wife. As man and wife we were created from the beginning. Your unhappy companion, had she found her heart's proper resting place, would have been a different woman. Marriage, my love, is an ordinance so holy that the Divine nature alone can fully comprehend it. In the Divine the male and female, the positive and negative of spiritual force, are truly united. With mortals this is seldom granted; with disembodied spirits it may be called into existence at will in a certain sense, but many who in the world have been unhappily mated, do not will it—they fear, and their fear prevents. But in the Divine it is a mighty force, the creative power calling into being the myriads of immortal souls with which the universe is filled."

"As I said before, I hear, I comprehend dimly, I believe instinctively—but I shall forget."

"Would you taste in some slight measure the ineffable bliss of a true conjugal union? That, my love, will be something which you can never forget."

"Most gladly!"

Then in an instant I was alone!

Alone? No, not alone! I was complete!

No words can do my feelings justice. A strange sensation of duality had come over me. I felt that there were two of us, and yet that I and the woman were mysteriously one.

But I could not see her—nor did I wish to see her. She seemed to be inside of me—it was rapture unspeakable to know that she was there.

I could hear her speak; I addressed her—she answered. She was mine, I was hers. Her soul was in my soul, her thoughts truly my thoughts. I was a man, and I knew that I had been but a fragment of a man before.

"George, I am here. You know me now. No length of time so long before we are thus finally brought together that you will forget."

"Never! Never! Never leave me, my beloved! I cried. "Remain in my soul forever! I have no wish now to go back to earth!"

But no sooner had I given utterance to this sentiment than she was at my side again, smiling sadly.

"Oh, you must not say that," she said. "Your life work has but begun. Do not think that this experience has been accorded you without a purpose. Nothing is without a purpose. Marriage is most grossly misunderstood by you mortals. It is to be your work to write of this and other strange experiences through which you are passing, so that those who care to read may know something of the truth."

"Come to me again!" I cried. "That taste of bliss makes me long for more! Come, my love—my wife!"

She shook her head and smiled.

"Not again, George. You have other duties to perform, as I have said. As it is your life cord was almost severed—you can see it there behind you, trailing like a silver thread."

But I had already seen it and did not even turn to look. I begged and pleaded until she bade me desist with a certain positiveness of manner which I did not altogether fancy. This she seemed to understand.

"You see," she said, "there is not true harmony between us yet; there cannot be until you have crossed the border. The veil still divides us, George."

"Can you not tear it aside and show me the spirit world?"

"No—oh no! That cannot be."

"But if I am a spirit, why not?"

"You are not a spirit in the word's full sense. Let that silver cord be severed and you would quickly see the spirit world, but that would be a calamity."

"Why a calamity?"

"It is a calamity for any man to leave earth life with his work unfinished. But I must now leave you. George, my love, my husband, my soul's true mate, I go, but I shall come once again. Farewell!"

She vanished like meadow mist before the rays of the rising sun, and I was alone.

Yet I felt her near me. I knew the sense of her presence now—nor has that knowledge ever left me—I knew that she was near me then, that her thoughts were impressing themselves upon my soul.

"Think of Maurice," she seemed to say; and immediately I thought of Maurice.

Had my planetary journey been prolonged for a purpose?

I do not know, but this much is certain, on the instant, when obeying that inward voice, I fixed my mind on Maurice, I stood at his side!

For me space had been obliterated. If it was all true and Maurice was on Mars, then was I also on Mars. I could see Maurice, but I instantly perceived that he was powerless to see me.

It was Maurice and it was not Maurice.

The person I stood beside was dressed in a long gown of blue satin, belted in at the waist and beautifully embroidered with flowers in their natural colors, but the face, though it bore some resemblance to my friend, was as the face of my mysterious acquaintance at Panompin. Like Mr. Mirrikh's face, half yellow, half black; yet inside of that body—and I seemed able to look inside without the slightest difficulty, I could see another man, perfect in every particular. This was Maurice De Veber as I knew him—there was no change.

When I first saw him I shouted his name aloud, but now finding that I could not make my presence known, I contented myself with simply looking at him and surveying his surroundings which were, of course, of the highest interest, for then I had not the slightest doubt that I was actually on the planet Mars.

Maurice was sitting upon a chair made of reeds plaited together, in a room of considerable size where there was a couch, also of plaited reeds, but no other furniture save an extra chair or two. He was smoking an odd-looking cigar; its shape was a perfect crescent, and instead of the odor of tobacco, it sent up with the smoke a most delicious perfume.

Now it seemed to me that it was morning and that Maurice had just arisen from the couch, where he had been sleeping all night with his present clothes on. With the

same ease I comprehended that this was the way people slept here; that they did not remove their clothing at night as we do, because their dress hangs perfectly loose upon them, and the daily bath is a universal custom. Thinking then of the naked men I had seen in my previous vision, it came to me that this was not the same country Maurice had first entered, but another where the manners and customs were different. At that instant my ears caught a burst of strange music outside, at which he sprang up and went darting through the door. It was a harmony of many sounds precisely such as we heard that rainy night in the ruined tower, when Mr. Mirrikh afterward came through the shawl in sections, scaring me almost out of my wits.

I followed Maurice, coming out upon a broad lawn bordered by great trees, all of species wholly strange to me, but not at all unlike the trees of temperate latitudes on earth. Beyond the trees was an open space—a public square apparently, where an immense crowd of people had assembled. On the other side of the square rose a great temple. Nothing in comparison with the structures seen in my previous vision, but still far larger than any building on earth.

Instinctively I floated away from Maurice and found myself inside this temple. As with everything else, I seemed to grasp its purpose at a glance, and knew that here people worshiped one God; a God all-powerful, executing His will through the instrumentality of myriads of ministering spirits. Many statues, superbly cut in snowy marble, stood beneath the great dome overshadowing the vast interior. They were representations of men and women once prominent in the social affairs of these people, whose spirits were supposed still to have the interests of the nation in charge.

Before each statue was a little altar, and upon most of the altars lay offerings of fruit and beautiful flowers.

That prayers to God, and consultation of the spirit guides sent in answer, constitute the religion of this race, was likewise impressed upon me. Forms, ceremonies, all the tricks and devices of priestcraft aiming at personal dominion are unknown here.

One God and all creation united with him in a harmonious desire to work His will; from the mightiest spirit of spheres celestial, to the humblest germ invisible even beneath the most powerful glass the ingenuity of man can devise.

Out again in the square the music called me now, and I knew that it was not instrumental but the production of the human voice.

The vast throng stood facing a choir of a hundred youths and as many maidens, who occupied a semicircular platform ranged around a sort of pulpit. Now for the first time I had a good view of these Martians, and saw that, except for the strange blackness about the face, the men were just the same as the men on Earth, and the nature of this discoloration I was now able to comprehend at a glance.

The faces of the women were perfectly fair, so with the boys; some of the young men exhibited the blackness, others younger did not, but no such thing as beards could be seen. The blackness, then, was the sign of virility, and really, when one comes to think of it, was no more disfiguring than a beard.

They were singing, and such amazing singing! From those two hundred human throats issued every sound capable of being produced by the finest orchestra ever gathered together. How they did it I do not pretend to say, but I could hear the notes of violins, flutes, flageolets, cornets and instruments innumerable, even to the bass viol and the boom of the big bass drum.

Again I was at Maurice's side. He was watching and listening.

Presently a man ascended the rostrum, and bareheaded, beneath those broad spreading branches, began to address the multitude. Intense grew my interest when I perceived that this man was Mr. Mirrikh. He announced that he would continue his lecture upon the manners and customs of the planet Earth.

And he spoke well. For fully fifteen minutes I listened. It seemed to be one of a series of lectures describing his earth journey. The point upon which he particularly dwelt was the gross ignorance in which the inhabitants of our planet were plunged concerning spiritual laws; our general disbelief in the existence and importance of such laws, extending even in many instances to a total denial of the existence of spirit and a spiritual world.

"And on their planet, even among those who admit the existence of a life after death, my friends," he shouted, "there is but little knowledge and still less desire to attain

to wisdom in matters spiritual. There men are satisfied to leave such things to priests whose mission, it appears, is to terrorize the ignorant, to distort and suppress such few facts as they possess; to load down their barbarous worship with senseless forms and ceremonies, until all knowledge of the Divine principle is obliterated, and all freedom of thought crushed. Even among the few enlightened minds existing on this planet a singular condition of affairs obtains; for these are for the most part men steeped in selfishness who strive to conceal rather than promulgate spiritual truth. Not that individual minds do not exist whose enlightenment in a sense approaches ours; but they are as grains of sand in the desert, and powerless to make themselves heard or their influence felt."

All this, and much more, I heard him say, and to my ears every word came in plain English, yet I seemed to know that he was not speaking my language, but that it was my inner consciousness which understood.

"But if I remain here I shall see nothing of Mars," I suddenly reflected, and the desire to comprehend something of the nature of the planet became intense.

I looked at Maurice, whom for the time being I had forgotten, and I now perceived what before I had failed to observe—Maurice was not alone.

There, beside him, stood a young woman of superb figure and sweet, gentle countenance. At first I thought she must be a spirit, for I became inwardly conscious of a certain harmonious blending of soul between them; but I soon perceived that she was still in the material body, and I knew also that already Maurice recognized this harmony; that he loved her, that she loved him.

Then my desire to be off reached an intensity no longer to be resisted, and I found myself floating over a vast city made up of the same low buildings previously observed, with here and there a temple or some public edifice thrown in.

Presently I was beyond the city and moving over forest and plain; all very beautiful, but in no essential particular differing from similar scenes on earth.

Soon I came to water—it was red. I looked above me—the clouds, of which there were but few, also had a reddish tinge.

I floated above the water with the same electric rapidity.

It was a land-locked sea, extending to a vast distance on either side of me, but its width was not great, and soon I had left it behind and was passing above a densely wooded country, more tropical in appearance than the land first seen.

Here I perceived, scattered through the forest, small groupings of huts of conical shape, made of branches and thatched, in and about which were people of widely different appearance from Mr. Mirrikh and his audience. They were small of stature and entirely naked; the color of their skin was a dirty brown; their foreheads were low and retreating, exhibiting little more intelligence than the Bushmen of Africa—scarcely as much.

Passing beyond this vast forest I came to another sea, and beyond that again to a beautiful country of great extent inhabited by a people similar to those whom I had seen at first.

Floating upon the seas I saw ships innumerable; they were not large, without sails, and seemed to be propelled by electricity. Animals of many kinds I saw also; nearly all differed from the animal forms of earth, and for me to attempt to describe them would only have the effect of adding to the ridicule which this part of my narrative is sure to call down upon my unfortunate head.

Soon I had passed over this stretch of country and another narrow sea lay before me, beyond which I perceived a more barren land; rather Arctic in appearance; this passed, vegetation ceased, and I found myself floating above immense plains buried beneath ice and snow.

I knew that I must now be nearing the Martian poles and my curiosity had become intense, when suddenly I heard that gentle voice again:

"Beware, George! You are going too far, your life cord is being strained beyond endurance. Fix your thoughts upon your body without delay!"

It was a bitter disappointment to me, but I could not disobey.

I closed my eyes and thought of that body which I had seen thrown into the shute with as little ceremony as if it had been a meal sack.

Instantly the wondrous scene was obliterated and all consciousness left me.

The next I knew I was experiencing precisely the same

sensations one feels when recovering from a fainting fit.

"Wylde! Wylde! Wake up! Wylde! Wylde! Speak to me, for God's sake!" some one was shouting in my ears.

It was the Doctor's voice.

I was surrounded by utter darkness lying upon a couch as hard as stone.

CHAPTER XXI.

PRISONERS UNDERGROUND.

"BREAKFAST! Breakfast! Come Wylde, turn out! All is ready for our sumptuous repast!"

A month has elapsed since my return from Mars and again the Doctor's hand is upon my shoulder; he is shaking me violently. I rub my eyes, yawn, straighten up and stare about.

The sight is not a cheerful one. Surrounding me are the walls of a vast cavern, possessed of none of that beauty of caverns about which poets and novelists love to rave. There are no snowy stalactites nor glittering stalagmites, nothing but the black, ragged rock, all dripping with moisture where the gloom permits my eyes to penetrate. The floor is of sand, mingled with which are whitish fragments strewn in every direction; these, though they have long since lost their terrors, never cease to be disquieting; they are human bones; bones of men who lived out their lives in ages long gone by; a musty odor seems to arise from them; the air is damp and chilly; rheumatic pains rack my own unfortunate bones as I stagger to my feet.

"Don't you want any breakfast?" asked the Doctor gloomily. "Not that I blame you much if you don't, for the fodder we've been subsisting on these last four weeks is enough to make a horse sick. You had better come and take your share though, for there will be no more until to-morrow. If we ever expect to escape we must keep up the physical no matter how our spirits flag."

"So you are beginning to acknowledge the existence of spirit, Doctor?" I said slyly.

"Pshaw! Don't you begin nagging thus early in the

day. I am reduced to the necessity of acknowledging it or quarrelling with you, George Wylde, and under the existing circumstances that would be a decided mistake."

I said no more, but followed the Doctor through the chamber in which we now found ourselves, into a larger one where a fire burned and Ah Schow was steeping tea in an old earthern pot. Upon a huge fragment of rock cups, saucers and plates were laid and several lamas sat around devouring rice with their chopsticks. Walla bent over the fire near our cook, busily stirring the contents of a huge, smoke-begrimed vessel; the glow of the fire alone shed light upon the scene.

Such was my situation now after the lapse of many weary days—days lengthened into weeks until, as I have said, a month had passed.

Who can wonder if I own to an inward longing for a second inhalation from that golden tube; if I sometimes wish my life cord might have been severed; that I was back again with Maurice and Mr. Mirrikh in Mars?

But enough of this.

We were now in a vast cavern opening back into the side of a mountain, but just where on the face of God's footstool this cavern was located, we did not know.

With us—by us I mean the Doctor and myself—were Padma and all his lamas save the one whom I had seen put the body of the old priest into the shute. That Walla and Ah Schow were likewise with us I have already said.

My return from Mars was to this cave. I opened my eyes to find the Doctor bending over me, using every effort to resuscitate what, as he assured me afterward, he fully believed to be a corpse; but he could scarcely have been more surprised when I rose up and spoke than I was to see *him*, for I had counted the Doctor as already dead.

His story was briefly told.

The Doctor boarded the car, and acting upon the information furnished him by Padma, started alone on his perilous journey. Of course I was immensely curious to learn how he had fared, but his description of the trip from the lamasery to the cavern was singularly vague.

"Upon my word, I can't tell you much about it, George," he said, when I came to question him. "I just held on to the rope and seemed to go with a rush. It was pitch dark, but there was plenty of air and the motion of the car

not rapid enough to take my breath away; I thought I was never going to reach the end, when all at once the rope parted, and the next thing I knew I was lying on the bottom of the car, which had ceased to move."

"And what did you do then?" I asked.

"Do! What could I do? It was all as dark as Erebus, and I hadn't the remotest idea where I was."

"You would have fared better if you had been less selfish and taken your chances with the rest of us," I answered; and then I told him something of my own experiences—but not all. But I maintained stoutly that I had seen Maurice; that in spirit I had been to Mars.

He would not admit it, of course; but I hardly think he altogether doubted. Returning to his own story he went on to say that at first he wandered about in a state bordering on madness, for what could he do there alone in the darkness but wander on till strength failed and death came to his relief?

Frightful must have been his mental suffering in those awful moments; fortunately for him, however, he was not called upon to endure them long, for suddenly he saw a light flash through the gloom and hurrying to it beheld Ni-fan-lu.

But let the Doctor give the rest in his own words.

"I was amazed beyond all telling, George. There stood the fellow precisely as I had last seen him.

"'How did you get here?'" I demanded.

"He threw up his hands upon seeing me and seemed even more startled than I was—I knew afterward that he believed me dead—I had to repeat my question a second time, and in answer he pointed to a square, box-like arrangement which projected through the wall of the cave, terminating a few inches above the floor."

"My body came through there," he said; "I inhaled the gas, left it, followed in spirit and took it up again."

"I might have argued with him, but before I could even answer, Walla came shooting out of the box and fell at my feet. You can imagine my amazement, when after a moment I saw her rise up and begin rubbing her eyes like one just awakening. I questioned her, but she could tell me nothing; she did not even remember how she had started, but commenced to cry out for Maurice. While I tried to quiet her Maurice's body came down, and after that yours, and

after yours came Ah Schow, and then lama after lama; at length your grip came flying out and a lot of bags followed it. Last of all came Padma all tied up with rags, but I had grown used to it by this time, and what worried me most was that you showed no sign of returning consciousness like the rest. It alarmed Padma not a little, too, and he immediately hypnotized Walla and began to question her. Her answers did not surprise me a bit, for by this time I was prepared for anything. She said that you had gone to seek Maurice in Mars."

Here, so far as can interest the reader, the Doctor's narative ended. Two points, however, may be alluded to. The distance between the lamasery and the cavern, and the length of time during which I had remained unconscious after the appearance of my body at the other end of the shute.

Concerning the first, I am unfortunately not in position to furnish any information, for the Doctor had not thought to note the time while the excitement continued. One thing is certain, those strange underground inclines were many miles in length; as for myself, Philpot assured me that he watched over my body for more than an hour and had just about given me up, when all at once I looked at him and spoke his name.

Now all this talk took place beside Maurice's body, which the Doctor and Ni-fan-lu had carefully conveyed to a rocky shelf on one side of the cavern, where I found it enveloped in that coarse bagging such as the Chinese wrap around tea chests. There was no change in the appearance of the face, nor had there been any as yet after the lapse of a full month. At night I slept beside it, by day Walla usually watched; between us both it was seldom left alone.

Whether or no the Doctor still believed Maurice dead I cannot positively say, for he had long since refused to discuss the matter. He freely admitted, however, that there was something very different from either death or the ordinary trance state about my friend's condition; and he would sometimes sit by for a long time holding a pocket mirror before the nostrils—but never a sign of moisture came upon the glass, and yet at no time was the body absolutely cold. Indeed the Doctor assured me that he was satisfied that no true *rigor mortis* had come upon it. Once he urged me to let him try bleeding, but I grew so excited in my refusal that he never mentioned the matter again.

Such, briefly told, are the salient points connected with our arrival in this strange place; and now, before resuming the thread of my narrative, let me speak a few words about the cave itself.

It was of vast extent, reaching far back into the heart of the mountain, but no efforts at exploration had been made. Just how we could be on a mountain at all I could not understand, unless the country from Psam-dagong down toward Lh'asa has a gradual descent; but on a mountain we were, Padma assured us, surrounded by rocks on all sides save one, and this one, when I first beheld it, I almost wished might be walled in too.

Here the cavern opened upon a roaring torrent, rushing down between perpendicular walls; foaming, boiling, tearing its way past the entrance like mad, with the water setting back into the cave for a distance of at least twenty feet.

Beyond we could see only a wall of gray granite, from which we were separated by the torrent.

"Our way lies there," said the old lama, calmly, "but the flood is here before us. We shall have to wait for the water to fall."

"But how are we to pass through that barrier?" I asked. "It is a pity that our bodies could not have been sent a little further on."

"A pity indeed. This I did not anticipate; but it would have made no difference. We chose the only possible way of escaping from Psam-dagong."

Let me mention that Padma made no allusion at any time to the Doctor's mad action. With that quiet good sense he ever displayed, the old lama let the matter drop.

"Is there a way of passing through that wall?" asked the Doctor.

"Most certainly," was the reply. "There is a passage directly through it leading down the mountain. From thence to Lh'asa the way is short and easy. Indeed the city might be discerned from the mountain tops beyond the river, could we but transport ourselves there."

"Ah! If we only could!" I cried; "but tell me, father, this passage: is it below the water level now?"

"It is, my son; we can only possess our souls in patience till the waters fall."

"And that will be when?"

"Buddha alone can answer."

"And in the meantime how are we to subsist?"

"There are stores of rice and other provisions in the cavern here upon which we shall be obliged to draw. Of water we have enough and to spare."

"And these provisions were placed here—when?"

"Years ago in anticipation of the bursting of the Dshambi-nor; still they are in good condition. I have examined them. Palatable they certainly are not, but they will sustain life."

"But how are we to cross even when the water falls; is there not a deep ravine?"

"So deep, my son, that to gaze upon it as I saw it in my boyhood would fill your soul with terror. There was a bridge here then; since it has been swept away; we must find means, if we can, to construct another; but one thing weighs heavily on my mind: even if we do in the end manage to cross here, what will become of you?"

"Why do you ask? Shall we not go with you?"

"Children," he said, gazing upon us pityingly, "so far as lies in my power I shall protect you, but know the worst. You are foreigners; worse still, you are English. The moment you pass through the gates of Lh'asa you will be seized and put to death. No Englishman has ever been known to enter the city save one, and he lost his life in the end. The law of our Chinese masters is most stringent. Your friend, Mr. Mirrikh, has left you no letter of safe conduct out of the country. It is simply impossible that you can ever escape from Thibet."

Not until now had we known this, for we could not read the letter Mr. Mirrikh had given us, which proved so perfect an open sesame into this strange land. Padma proceeded to inform us that it only requested that we be passed to Psamdagong, but it made no provision whatever for our return, and not under any circumstances would it save us once we were in Lh'asa.

It was a gloomy outlook. Padma's reference to Mr. Moorcroft, who lived twelve years in Lh'asa in disguise, did not cheer us any.

Moorcroft arrived at Lh'asa by way of Ladak, in 1820. He wore the dress of a Mahommedan and managed to deceive the police up to the last. Indeed his murder was the work of a mountain banditti, and not until his effects

came to be examined was the fact of his being an Englishman known.

"By Jove, this is a bad business!" said the Doctor after Padma left us. "I've been expecting something of this sort, Wylde. The only thing left is for us to turn Buddhists. Oh, for the levitating powers of Mirrikh! Bless me! but those were not half bad days at the musty old Nagkon Wat. Would that they were back again."

But wishing could bring no change in our situation. Day after day while Walla and I watched by Maurice's body the Doctor watched the water at the mouth of the cave.

For eight days it continued to rise, until at last, instead of extending twenty feet back into the cave it reached more than fifty. Very naturally we began to wonder if it would keep on rising and ultimately drown us out; but on the ninth day, to my intense relief, it began to fall, and after that kept on falling, until now it was below the entrance of the passage through the granite wall on the other side of the ravine, or cañon, as I preferred to call it; we could still see the water rushing madly when we wished, but it was necessary to lean out of the cave to do this, for our rocky prison was now entirely dry.

Such was the situation on that morning when the Doctor called me to breakfast.

At my appearance Walla turned her share of the cooking over to Ah Schow and hastily retreated to take her place beside Maurice's body. And in this connection I may as well say that my feelings toward the poor girl had long since assumed proper shape. The love which I, in my ignorance, thought I felt for her, I knew now belonged to another; to a being not of this world, whose very existence had become to me but a beautiful dream.

Thus Walla, no longer annoyed by the consciousness that I was always watching her, came to be upon very good terms with me; and although we spoke but seldom, we thoroughly understood each other so far as Maurice was concerned, and was not that enough?

There was nothing particularly remarkable about this day, except that it rained, and so long as the daylight lasted —it was precious little of it we saw—there was a steady drip at the mouth of the cave.

We had fallen into a regular routine by this time. Padma gathered his lamas about him at stated hours, and so far as

they were able, the rules of the lamasery were preserved; prayer wheels were ground and spiritual instruction given. At first the Doctor undertook to explain something of Padma's discourses, for every other day the venerable lama kindly consented to deliver them in Hindustani, which language several of his flock understood; but it was hard translating to me, and as the Doctor soon grew tired of the task, we gave it up.

When not engaged in religious exercises, the lamas kept themselves busy as best they could, and foremost among their occupations was the plaiting of long strips of hide, out of which it was intended to construct a bridge to throw across the cañon, though how this was to be accomplished I could not comprehend. The hides were found in the cave in the small chamber where the provisions had been stored. The former bridge was likewise of hide, Padma informed us, and these had been placed where we discovered them for the purpose of renewing it when necessary. But one thing I may say right here, we found it very difficult to draw much information about the country or the cave and its history from the old superior of Psam-dagong, for in spite of his friendly manner he seemed determined that in case we ever did succeed in leaving Thibet alive, it should be in utter ignorance about the land and its resources, so far as he was concerned. Often we questioned him on these points, but his replies were always vague and unsatisfactory, and the conversation was dropped as soon as possible. Perhaps, indeed, the old man's life had been such a retired one that his information was but slight on matters other than of a spiritual nature; but the Doctor maintained, and I agreed with him, that he probably thought he acted under orders from the Grand Lama, for he would at times retire and be absent for hours, and upon his return declare that he had been in spirit to Lh'asa and in consultation with his superior. I give all this just as we received it at the time, and shall make no comments upon its probable truth or falsity. Once I asked him why during these visits he could not provide for our departure from the country, but he cut me short by saying that such things were impossible; that his conversations in spirit with his superior were only of a spiritual nature, that he could not even bring help to assist us in our leaving the cave.

Thus the days came and went, and the time drew near

when our departure was to take place; indeed there was no reason why a move should not be made now, so far as I could see, for the bridge was complete and the water had fallen below the opening in the wall on the opposite side of the cañon. Padma informed us, however, that nothing could be done until a certain holy day, and declined to tell us when this would come or how the bridge was to be thrown across the cañon. Indeed all his communications to us were involved in so much mystery that our anxiety became intense; yet we were powerless to do anything and tried to be as patient as circumstances would permit.

"There's something wrong about it all, George!" the Doctor kept saying. "With all his mildness and pretended fatherly interest in our welfare, I don't trust Padma. We are foreigners, and the old fellow has all the prejudices of his race. Be very sure we shall never leave Thibet alive."

And such were some of the sayings and doings of the dreary days during which we remained prisoners underground.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RETURN.

"GOOD evening, my children! The day is spent at last, but the sunlight will soon come again. Our time in this gloomy retreat grows short, and before we leave it forever, I would show you more of the mysteries of Nature; I am about to consult my spirit guides as to the proper steps to be taken in your case. Would it please you to be present and increase your store of wisdom? I do not urge it, I only suggest that wisdom, no matter how acquired, must ever assist in the progress of the soul toward that blessed Nirvana where we shall be in Buddha and his all-pervading essence more fully in us."

"By all means let us join him, George," said the Doctor. "Anything to break this infernal monotony. Shall I say yes?"

"Ask him if he cannot go through his ceremony right

here," I replied. "I do not want to leave Maurice just now."

"But why not now as well at another time? You often leave him with Walla for hours together."

"I do not know. I have strange feelings about Maurice to-night. It seems to me that a change is at hand; that before many hours the monotony of our existence here, which has been so irksome to us both, will be broken. I cannot explain my feelings, but I am determined to remain where I am."

He raised no objection. He seldom did that now to anything, but turned to Padma and translated my reply.

Nor had the old lama, rather to my surprise, any objection to offer.

"What I am about to do can as well be done here as elsewhere," he answered. "I leave you now, but I shall return presently. Remain as you are and try and bring your minds into a state of perfect quiescence."

Thus saying Padma retreated, leaving the Doctor and myself to discuss the best methods of becoming quiescent—rather a difficult matter under the circumstances.

Walla at the time was seated upon the sandy floor close to the shelf of rock where Maurice's body lay. She seldom spoke in these days, but seemed to live only in the contemplation of those cold, white features. Sincerely I pitied the girl. Far better for her would it have been had she remained among her own people. The education which she had received had done nothing for her but to make her discontented with the sphere in which her lot was cast, and foster within her hopes and aspirations impossible of realization; for what could she ever be to Maurice or Maurice to her, even if the miracle we hoped for should be accomplished and that body rise again?

How little the best of us can comprehend the future. What spiritual relation Maurice bore to poor Walla, God alone can tell; that her work for him was to be of the utmost importance will be seen before my story is at an end.

In less than ten minutes Padma was back again, and with him came a young lama whose name I have striven in vain to remember. He carried in his arms a heap of argols—part of the stores of the caves—which he flung down upon the sand with a sigh of relief.

"Are the others not to be with us?" asked the Doctor.

"No; they have retired to rest," was the answer. "What we are now about to do can best be done in the presence of but a few. Indeed your own presence may interfere with matters to some extent, but I am determined that you shall see."

I made no reply, for we had agreed to throw ourselves fully into the channels of Padma's thought, whatever they might be. Indeed I shall even now forbear to comment upon the scene, but simply content myself with describing it as we saw it on that ever memorable night.

The first thing Padma did was to produce a small musical instrument resembling a drum head in shape; a wooden hoop with parchment covering. Seating himself in Oriental fashion, he spoke a few words to the lama who had scooped out a hole for the argols and started a blaze.

Immediately the lama threw aside his robe and we saw that he was entirely naked save for a strip of cloth about his loins; in this condition he seated himself cross legged before the fire and Padma ordered the Doctor to extinguish the wretched lamp which stood on the ledge near Maurice's face. This action aroused Walla; she raised up and looked curiously at us. I doubt if she had even heard our conversation regarding the matter, for she seemed surprised, although she did not speak.

"It will be necessary for you to remain perfectly quiet," said Padma. "To those who speak to you talk freely; otherwise say nothing—do not even move."

"What the mischief!" muttered the Doctor. "Who is he talking about? Who is there to speak to us beside himself?"

"Peace!" cried the old lama peremptorily, his ears catching the murmur of the Doctor's voice. "Peace, my children, or we cannot proceed."

We were silent immediately, and Padma placing his drum head upon his knees, began monotonously beating it with two small sticks. There was no attempt at harmony, just a steady tap! tap! I could but think, as I watched him, that precisely such were the operations of the medicine men among our American Indians, and indeed the prophets of all primitive people, so far as my reading has shown me. Meanwhile his companion sat with folded arms, rocking his naked body to and fro, his eyes fixed upon the dull glow of the smoldering argols; occasionally his lips seemed to move.

Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed. We began to grow impatient, and the Doctor was in a dreadful fidget, for nothing whatever had happened. What we expected was that the lama would become entranced and begin speaking by what professed to be spirit inspiration. What actually did happen was something of a totally different sort.

Still the tapping of the drum continued, until the strain grew fearful and each tap seemed to burn its way into my brain like red hot iron. For relief I removed my eyes from the rocking body of the lama and looked at Walla. Her head was bowed low upon her breast. She seemed to be asleep.

"Look! look!" breathed the Doctor before I could move my eyes back to the lama again.

I looked and saw that a change had come; a change the meaning of which, I at least, should be able to recognize even if the Doctor could not; the body of the lama had ceased to move and around it a whitish mist was gathering; this rapidly increased in density until it became a great oblong ball of light, which bounded up and down upon the sand for a few seconds and then vanished like a flash.

"Children you *must* not speak!" whispered Padma; "but for your interruption the spirit would have succeeded. No matter; it will come again."

"Materialization, by Jove!" breathed the Doctor almost inaudibly, but he held his tongue after that.

In a moment the light appeared again and this time there was no bounding about. Padma beat his drum faster and faster and then suddenly ceased altogether. As he did so we saw the figure of a man rise at the feet of the lama; sink back again, rise a second time and stand erect. To our intense astonishment this person was almost a counterpart of Padma himself; not only in point of age and features, but in dress. Without even glancing in our direction, he walked with firm tread toward the old lama who bowed low before him; extending his hand he raised Padma, embraced and kissed him; then side by side they walked together into the shadows of the cave and disappeared.

I looked at the Doctor triumphantly, only to find him staring at me.

"Just as I saw it at the inn of Zhad-uan" I whispered, forgetting Padma's injunction of silence; but the Doctor did not answer and for excellent reason. A ball of light, precisely similar to the other, was hovering at my feet.

Breathlessly we watched it, but after a few seconds it disappeared. I remembered Mr. Mirrikh's injunction and whispered to the Doctor to turn his head away; but this, it seemed, was not necessary, for at the same instant I saw what appeared to be a mass of moving white drapery upon the floor, and suddenly a female form rose up and approached my companion with outstretched arms.

"Miles—Miles, my boy, don't you know me?" I heard her whisper in hoarse, sepulchral tones.

"My mother!" burst from the Doctor. He started up and drew back in terror.

Instantly the white figure sank down and seemed to desolve into nothingness; but there was the naked lama crouching by the fire still, his eyes closed, his head bent forward upon his breast. To all appearance he was sound asleep.

"You fool!" I whispered. "Why did you do so? If that was indeed your mother's spirit she surely would have done you no harm."

He brushed his hand across his face which I could see was damp with perspiration.

"George, if we are going mad, then God help us! If that was my mother's spirit, then I *am* a fool! Anyhow, she is the last person I want to see."

"As far as that is concerned you probably know your own business best. Did she resemble your mother?"

"She did—most decidedly."

"She was certainly a woman of advanced years. I noticed her bent form and her thin features. One thing is sure, she could speak English, and what's more she knew your name."

He muttered something which I did not catch. I would have questioned him further, but the sound of footsteps announced that Padma was returning, and I forbore.

The old lama came alone, seated himself before the fire and took up his drum.

"My children, we may speak a few words now, while the spirits renew their forces," he said. "Have you also had visitors from the world unseen?"

"There was a female here," replied the Doctor, curtly. "As to where she came from probably you know best."

"Where could she have come from? Is there a woman in this cave beside your companion who sits behind you?"

"She was not the one."

"Then indeed you have beheld a spirit. Did she not inform you who she was?"

"No," replied the Doctor, so savagely that Padma sighed and resumed his drumming, nor did I attempt to interfere, or even to ask what had become of the form which walked away with him and failed to return.

Ten minutes more elapsed and then the light again appeared hovering about the slumbering lama; the drumming came faster and faster and the end was the same as before, but this time it was a young man who rose up, and to my intense excitement I saw that he wore a black dress coat and trousers, with snowy shirt front and polished boots. In short he was in European dress, when no such clothes, let it be remembered, were in the possession either of the Doctor or myself.

We watched him breathlessly. For a few seconds he seemed to totter, his hands went up and he began to rub his eyes.

Presently he moved forward with uncertain step, as a man might walk when treading on thin ice, and extending his hands toward me, repeated in that same sepulchral voice, a single word:

"Papa! Papa!"

I was upon my feet in an instant; every drop of blood in my veins seemed turned to fire. I was expecting spirits, I had even thought of several of my defunct friends whom I should have been pleased to see, but I had never thought of this.

"Who—who are you?" I gasped. "In God's name tell me—can it be——"

"Can it be that I am your boy, papa? Yes; I am no one else!"

He caught both my hands and held them. His were icy cold, but they were flesh and blood.

"Willie!" I murmured.

"Yes, Willie—your son. I am ever with you, papa. This trial is soon to pass. Do not fear."

"But you are a man; my Willie was but a baby!"

"Has time ceased, papa? Think of the years?"

"Yet not enough for this change."

"Enough and more than enough in the realm of spirit. Good-night, papa. Think as kindly of mama, as you can!"

He was going down! Slowly his form sank before my eyes until nothing but the head remained visible on the sand.

"Good-night, dear papa! Good-night!"

Then the head vanished like a puff of smoke!

"By the immortal Cæsar! I've nothing to say after that!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Have you a son dead? Say yes, and I'm a Spiritualist from this moment."

"I have."

"And his name—but look! Look!"

He paused suddenly and pointed to Padma, who had arisen and drawn nearer to us.

The cause was plain enough. Between the old lama and the fire stood two hideous forms. They were men of low stature, with enormous heads, ugly and misshapen, great bulging eyes and fearful mouths. They kept moving round and round in a circle, darting towards us glances of malignant hate.

Immediately Padma produced his prayer wheel and began grinding it furiously, calling out unintelligible sentences in Thibetan. After a moment the two forms sank down and vanished, upon which the old lama gave a sigh of relief.

"They are the spirits of the ancients," he said; "once dwellers in this cavern, where they still linger near their bones. They saw their opportunity and seized it, but we cannot profitably converse with such as they, so I bade them begone."

"Whence comes this wonderful gift, father?" I asked. "Explain something of the nature of the phenomena. Was that indeed my son with whom I spoke?"

"The gift comes from heaven, as do all the gifts we possess, my child. As for your son you should be the best judge. I do not even know that you have a son."

"I lost a son—an infant."

"Nothing is lost. If you ever had a son you have him still; the mere fact of his being unable to control the material body is nothing. What can annihilate a human soul? Nothing; not even the will of Buddha. He can absorb, it is true, but I say again, nothing is lost."

"But my son was but an infant when he left me—it is not so long ago."

"Infants born of intelligent parents soon become men and women in the realm of spirit. A few years at the most almost always suffices. Often it is but a few months."

"You speak as with knowledge. With my people it is different. While many claim to believe in the existence of spirits, few think of them as other than intangible and wholly incomprehensible beings, whose lives are passed in eternal rest or eternal suffering. For one to lay claim to any accurate information in the matter, is only to excite ridicule or persecution for none will believe their claim."

"I speak as with knowledge, my son, because I have knowledge. The realm of spirit is everywhere. Men may question its existence, but this can only be for a short time while they remain grossly material in their nature. As for your eternal rest, I cannot understand it any more than I can your notion of eternal punishment. Does the sun ever rest? Does the earth ever cease its revolutions, or the stars their own proper motion? Man is born to be useful, and rest, which is but a state of mind rather than a condition, can only come through constant activity in one's sphere of use. I can see it in no other light. As for the other—punishment may indeed be eternal to such as cannot lay aside gross and material thoughts; the punishment of remaining in them, with the spiritual surroundings which such thoughts must of necessity bring; but beyond that I cannot understand you. Is it of arbitrary punishment by the will of the Supreme that you speak?"

"It is, father—such are the teachings of our priests."

"Then most grossly are they in error, most densely must their minds be steeped in spiritual ignorance. Have they no spirit guides to teach them better? I cannot understand such a condition of affairs. In this land the masses know but little of such matters, it is true, but with the lamas it is different. I might say further that we do not always deem it best to raise men above their sphere, but we never wilfully deceive as your priests must surely do, for they cannot themselves be ignorant of the truth."

"I think they are, as you view it, father. Some of them are most worthy men; but tell me whence comes the power to take on the material body in which these forms have appeared to us?"

"I care not to fully explain. What are our bodies but condensations of certain molecules? Mind controls matter. If disembodied intelligences so will it, what is to prevent the hasty condensation of the molecules and the formation of a temporary body in any shape they desire to assume?"

"And this is the way the phenomena we have witnessed was accomplished?"

"It is."

"But those hideous creatures, whence came they? By whose will were they sent here?"

"That is different. They were not sent here, they were here already, as I have told you; have been here for thousands of years, perhaps. Possibly they were able to draw strength from the dry bones which lay scattered all about us. It may be so."

"But their hideous faces? Were there ever men such as they?"

"Very possibly those were not their true faces, but such as correspond to their present state."

"Correspond to their state? I do not understand you."

"Yet it is simple. In the realm of spirit a man appears to others as he really is, spiritually. Thus a vile man would appear hideous to your eyes, while to himself he seems just the reverse."

"Do our fears create forms?" asked the Doctor breaking in suddenly.

"They do," replied Padma;" or rather they draw about us spirits of corresponding natures; but I must talk no more. There are yet other spirits who would appear, and—ha! We have talked too long already! Those fiends have gained control of the forces again!"

A wild, unearthly cry, sounding as at a distance in the depths of the cave, suddenly rang out. Instantly came an answering cry—then another and another until similar cries were coming from all directions. Now they seemed close to us; again, they would retreat and die away in the distance. Some were like the human voice, others like the cries of animals; one in particular, which kept coming and going, was startlingly like the whining of a dog in distress. Padma meanwhile had resumed his prayer wheel and was grinding vigorously, having enjoined upon us on no account to speak if we valued our lives and reason. As for Walla, she was evidently either asleep or entranced, for through it all she never moved. For perhaps ten minutes these strange sounds continued. Padma seemed to be making but little progress in laying the spirits which were supposed to haunt the cave.

Suddenly I felt the Doctor's trembling hand lightly touch my arm. He was pointing toward the fire, out of which I

could now dimly discern hideous faces peering at us by dozens. Not only were they in the fire itself, but around and above, coming and going, flitting about in every direction. For the most part they were recognizably human faces and evil-looking beyond description. Not a few animal faces were mingled with them, however; these were not the faces of modern animal forms, but looked as though they might have escaped from the pages of some geological text book, freely illustrated with prehistoric creatures. They seemed to come and go, as did also the more human faces, with a sort of pulsation; beside this the whole mass of faces had a rotary movement with the fire for its axis. Words fail when I attempt to express the horror which seized me as I gazed.

"By heavens, Wylde, this is worse than the D. Ts!" whispered the Doctor.

Was it the mere act of speech which did the mischief?

I cannot answer; I only know that instantly as the Doctor uttered these words, the whole mass of heads and faces seemed to detach itself from the fire and come bounding toward us over the sand, enveloped in a milky cloud, while the cave fairly rang with wild yells and hideous screeches.

We sprang to our feet and backed against the wall, for retreat was impossible. I do not pretend to analyze the Doctor's feelings, but I know that for the moment my fear was intense, and I found myself doing what I had not done since my childhood—repeating the prayer for God's protection which I had learned to lisp at my mother's knee.

"Away! Away you devils! Get back to hell!" roared the Doctor.

Then above the terrific din which filled the cavern, old Padma's voice could be distinguished uttering unintelligible words in clear distinct tones.

Suddenly the voices ceased and there was only the old lama's audible; for a moment the bounding mass seemed to halt in its advance, though the movement of the faces still continued. Then all at once the whole was obliterated and we were facing Padma; his eyes were blazing with passion, his face livid with rage.

"Fools! Madmen!" he burst out. "Would you endanger your own lives as well as mine? So much for attempting to instruct such minds as yours in our occult mysteries. It is enough! My guide spoke truly when he warned me against you. Let your fate be upon your own heads!"

In vain the Doctor stammered words of apology, but the venerable lama seemed not to hear.

Striding toward his entranced subordinate, he made a few hasty passes about his head, whereupon the lama's eyes were opened and he staggered to his feet, reeling like one intoxicated; most surely would he have fallen had not Padma caught him in his arms.

"Speak to him! Pacify him!" I whispered to the Doctor. "Our lives depend wholly upon him."

"Can't do it," was the reply. "Better wait until he has quieted down a bit. He is too furious to listen to any explanation now."

Fatal error! That the Doctor lived to repent his decision we shall presently see.

But the opportunity was lost, for without speaking again, Padma, still supporting the young lama, retreated in the direction of his own quarters and we were left alone.

I hastened to light the lamp, for the fire was now dying down; as I did so I instinctively glanced at Maurice's face and thought I could discern a change.

I shouted to the Doctor, and held the lamp closer.

Just then Walla roused up, rubbed her eyes and in a trembling voice asked what the matter was; the Doctor put the same question, for he was already at my side.

"Look! look!" I exclaimed. "Moisture on the forehead!"

"Don't deceive yourself, George; it is all your excited imagination. No! By the gods, it's a fact!"

At the same instant I felt a rush of cold air pass my face and even as we looked the eyelids began to twitch.

We gazed in breathless silence. I could see Walla's big, black orbs dilate. I could hear the quick beating of my own heart.

Suddenly a convulsive shudder was seen to pass over the body; the eyes opened and fixed themselves upon mine.

"Maurice! Maurice!" I shouted, springing forward.

But Walla was before me. With a wild cry she flung herself upon his breast.

Now indeed were we face to face with a mighty mystery; now indeed was the promise of the man Mirrikh fulfilled.

If his words were truth, if my own strange experiences were facts and not fancies, then Maurice had returned from Mars.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DESERTED.

"MAURICE! Oh Maurice! Speak to me, Maurice! For God's sake tell me this is real!"

He pushed Walla aside with a look of loathing, and raising himself to a sitting position spoke, for we had already torn off the bagging in which his body was swathed.

"George!"

"Oh Maurice!"

I am not ashamed to own it. I was crying like a child. I bent forward and would have flung my arms about him, when to my dismay he thrust me away too.

"No, no! Don't do that!" he cried. "You musn't do it! Where is she? I can't see her. Where is she, George?"

I felt a shiver pass over me. Was he mad?

"Do you mean Walla? She is here, Maurice."

The girl stood facing him; her lips tightly set, her face as livid as the face of a corpse.

"No, no! I don't mean Walla at all. You know very well who I mean, George Wylde. You saw her in Mars, Mirrikh told me so. Where is she, I say?"

"I do not understand you," I replied. "Try and pull yourself together, old fellow. Your mind is wandering. Doctor, for God's sake do something. He is mad! Unless there is help we shall lose him again."

"What can I do?" groaned the Doctor.

"I will call Padma!"

"To the mischief with Padma! We have had enough of him. Maurice, my dear boy, your mind is wandering a bit, and no wonder. You have had a fearful experience. Try——"

"Stop! Let me think! Do not speak to me until I speak to you."

He buried his face in his hands and for several moments remained silent. I looked around to see if Walla had grown calmer. To my surprise I saw her gliding off into the darkness. Most sincerely did I pity the girl, but what

could I do for her? She loved him, he had rejected her. Words were not necessary to convey to a mind so open to impression as hers the true state of Maurice De Veber's heart.

Silently the Doctor and I stood contemplating him until at length the hands were removed.

I started back in amazement. What I saw the Doctor saw also; he uttered a quick exclamation of astonishment.

The whole appearance of Maurice's face had changed.

It was Maurice and it was not Maurice.

Every feature was altered; every line had softened; there was an indescribable beauty about the countenance of my friend which was wholly unnatural. Even his voice was different; it was no longer the deep voice of Maurice, but pitched in a higher key.

"George Wylde!" he said almost stiffly; "I want to feel that you mean to stand by me whatever happens. I have passed through a wonderful experience, I am passing through the most wonderful part of it now, and I need all your help and sympathy."

"And you shall have it, Maurice—you have it already, my dear boy."

"And you, Doctor, are not to question me. Hear me, my friends: I do not know how long a time has elapsed since I parted from you, but of all that has happened during that time I have nothing to tell—absolutely nothing. Do you understand?"

His voice rose almost to a shriek as he spoke these last words. His whole frame trembled with emotion. Tears sprang to his eyes.

The Doctor behaved splendidly.

"There there! Don't disturb yourself! No one is going to question you," he answered. "Are you hungry? Would you not like something to eat?"

"I—I suppose so. I do not know. The thought of food nauseates me, and yet I suppose I had better take it. How long is it, George?"

"A month," I answered gloomily.

"Only a month! It seems years! And you got back safely. I did not see you, old fellow, but Mirrikh did. A wonderful man that! Oh God, to come back to this dreary world again after the life I have been leading! It is horrible! Horrible! But that is not the worst."

"What can you mean?" I breathed.

"Which is the worst? To suffer yourself or drag those you love into torment?" he asked fiercely.

And as he spoke his face completely changed. Again he was Maurice—Maurice speaking in deadly earnest, if not in anger—then like a flash the face was transformed again, became as before, and over it spread a sad smile.

"Do not be angry with—with me," he said. "I cannot help it. I am not fully master of myself."

I was too deeply concerned for anger. Was he indeed mad? If not, then what *did* it all mean?

"You shall have food at once," I said. "Meanwhile can you bear being left alone a moment?"

"Why certainly; but stay, I want to know where I am. What place is this? This is not the chamber from which I started on my journey to Mars?"

"No; it is not. Great changes have come to us since then, Maurice. Let me advise you not to question us now. Later on we will tell you——"

"No! No! Now! Tell me now!"

"Would you object to letting me feel your pulse, Maurice?" asked the Doctor.

He submitted quietly enough. The Doctor performed the operation and dropped the hand without comment.

"Why don't you stand up?" he asked.

"Because I do not chose to."

"Are you in pain?"

"Yes—no!"

"Which?"

"No—no?"

"I should like to see you walk a few steps."

"But you won't!" he flashed, and again that marvelous change of facial expression came and went.

The Doctor would have pressed him further, but he turned beseechingly to me.

"George, won't you tell me?"

I told him all. I could not refuse.

He listened, making no comment until I had uttered the last word.

"Then our situation is desperate?"

"Most desperate."

"Even if we escape from the cave there is no help for us?"

"None, it would seem."

"Yet Mirrikh promised," he murmured, "and I shall trust him. Have no fear, George. We shall escape from this peril. We shall see New York again."

"God grant it! But let me say a word in behalf of Walla, Maurice. Though humble enough and of another race than ours, the poor girl loves you. Be kind to her, Maurice. If you could have seen the devotion with which she watched over you; if——"

"Say no more!" he interrupted. "I shall be kind, but if, as you say, she loves me, then she must learn to unlove. Of course you understand——"

"Of course, of course; but you wounded her feelings terribly."

"Cannot you mend matters? I thought you were mad about the girl yourself."

I shook my head.

"I have passed out of that state long ago, Maurice. I did not know myself."

"No; but I know you, George; I know you better now than ever before. You need not explain further. The gas has done its work for you as well as for me."

"It has! God knows it has."

I thought then of that face and its heavenly beauty. It seemed as if a single word was whispered in my ear.

"Hope!"

I heard it! I positively declare I heard it. The voice was as real as was Maurice's which followed, asking for something to eat.

And thus in sadness and mystery began the night of Maurice's return; a night of horrors which will never cease to be present in my waking moments, or to disturb my dreams.

"I will go and fetch some rice," said the Doctor. "Come Wylde, I have a word to say."

I glanced at Maurice, but he made no objection and with the Doctor's hand upon my arm I walked into the shadows. It was not until we were out of hearing that he spoke.

"I want you to prepare yourself for the worst," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Maurice can't live. It is useless for me to kick against the pricks any longer. I own that all this is wonderful, most mysterious; but there is something seriously

wrong with our friend, physically. Did you ever hear of a man having a double pulse, George Wylde?"

"A double pulse! I am entirely at a loss to understand you. What in heaven's name do you mean by a double pulse?"

"I mean precisely what I say. I was impressed to feel his pulse. I cannot tell you why, but so it was. There are two beats for every one."

"Do you mean two beats together?"

"I mean two separate and distinct beats together and in the same second of time."

"You must be mad, Doctor. Who ever heard of such a thing?"

"I never did—that I swear. Furthermore, I swear that I am not mad. Indeed I am strongly inclined to believe that I am the only thoroughly sane person in this cave."

He spoke further in the same strain; he positively assured me of the truth of his marvelous statement, and reiterated his belief that there was something all wrong with Maurice's heart, and that unless an immediate change came he could not long survive. After a moment I left him, and while he went on to fetch the rice I started to return.

I had not gone far before I perceived Walla coming toward me, springing from heaven knew where—the cave was full of turns and corners—she held up her hand warningly, and pointed in the direction of Maurice.

"What is it, Walla?" I asked kindly.

"What ails him? Is he going to die?" she murmured.

"I hope not. God grant that he may not."

"Something is wrong?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I cannot explain. Something about his heart."

"His heart! No! Not that! He is mad! He is talking gibberish! He must be mad for he drives me from him—I who would lay down my life to save his!"

She caught me by the hand and drew me to a place where a projecting point in the rock wall enabled us to watch Maurice unseen.

He was sitting just as we had left him. Although I thought myself prepared for anything I was certainly not prepared for what followed.

Maurice was talking in two languages. At one moment

he spoke in English, the next and he seemed to answer himself in an unknown tongue; and the faint glow of the lamp striking full upon his face I saw those same wondrous changes come and go. When he spoke in English it was Maurice's face which was turned toward me, his deep voice which uttered the words; but when he suddenly broke out in what Walla called gibberish, the face grew almost feminine in its beauty and the voice changed to that of a woman. It is so! I swear it! It was a most marvelous thing to watch those transformations come and go.

"But what was he saying?

The first I heard was:

"For God's sake tell me the worst. Can there never be a change?"

Strange words in that other voice followed.

"But what am I to do?"

Again the answer. Let me give something of this most peculiar conversation. The words spoken in the unknown tongue I must represent by dashes. I can do nothing else.

"I can never live so. I feel a sense of suffocation as though I was going to burst."

"—— —— —— ——"

"Will time make it easier?"

"—— —— —— ——"

"No; I cannot rise. The weight holds me down."

"—— —— —— ——"

"I will try to walk if you insist upon it; but I know I shall fall."

He tottered to his feet, and staggered a few steps, precisely as a man might walk who was bearing a heavy burden. It was painful to watch him. I should have spoken now but something appeared to restrain me. In a moment he seemed to give it up, and retreating to the stone bench, sank down panting.

"It is no use. I can't do it. I can never walk this way!"

"—— —— —— ——"

"Can we not return?"

"—— —— —— ——"

"But what about my friends? I can never control myself. If I escape from this place and return to my own country they will put me into a lunatic asylum, for I cannot hope to make them understand."

"—— —— —— ——"

"You say there is one who will understand me—do you mean George Wylde?"

"—— —— —— ——"

"Shall I tell him?"

"—— —— —— ——"

"I fear even him."

At this point a hand was suddenly laid upon my arm. I looked around expecting to see Walla, but instead saw the Doctor. He was holding a bowl of rice and looking at me questioningly. To my surprise I perceived that Walla had again disappeared.

Strange creature! I never understood her. Sometimes now I find myself wondering if it was all her love for Maurice; if her father's terrible fate had not left its mark upon the poor girl's brain.

"What is it? What's the matter?" demanded the Doctor.

"I was watching Maurice," I said, hurriedly explaining.

"What did I tell you? We are not out of the woods with Maurice yet by a good deal."

"But how do you account for it? By the way, did you meet Walla? She was here a second ago, but seems to have vanished again."

"No; I saw nothing of her. As for accounting for Maurice's present condition I don't profess to be able to do it. You who lay claim to having taken a planetary journey yourself ought to understand better than I; but he seems to be sitting perfectly quiet. Weren't you mistaken?"

"No, no! He has stopped talking. He hears us. It is no use now."

Maurice ate the rice with no show of hunger. I make this statement particularly, for I want it understood that whatever may be said of his spirit, his physical body had received no nourishment for a full month—to this I am prepared to swear.

When we finished eating, the Doctor, with many a sigh, produced the pipe and the last remnant of the tobacco.

"There you are, old man," he said. "I know you must be dying for a smoke. I have tried to keep your pipe from drying up the best I could."

So far Maurice had maintained a gloomy silence, but to my infinite relief it was now my friend's dear face at which I was looking, not the other one; that, beautiful though it was, I had almost come to fear.

"Well, upon my word, Doctor, I believe I *should* enjoy a smoke," he answered almost cheerfully.

He took the pipe and began to fill it, while the Doctor kept rattling away.

"Had a smoke since you left, Maurice?"

"Oh yes!"

"They smoke in Mars then."

"Yes."

"Can't you relent and tell us something? George was kinder. He told me his experience."

"I can tell you nothing, Doctor, but I would like to ask you one question and George another."

"I'll be forgiving then and answer. Fire away."

"Do you believe that I have actually been to Mars?"

The Doctor hesitated.

"Why as to that, I hardly know what to say," he replied. "Since you left us, Maurice, my mind has been in a curiously muddled state. So many strange things have been forced upon me that in spite of reason I have been obliged to waver in my utter disbelief in the spiritual. I know Wylde to be a man of positive and unimaginative character. I know that he would not wilfully deceive me, and I am willing to believe that he thinks he went to Mars. Further than that, there is my own experience, of which he has, perhaps, told you. I thought I went to Mars and said as much when I came to my senses. That is about where I stand. I am bound to admit also that the inhaling of the gas, be its nature what it may, produces effects altogether beyond the range of medical knowledge. I am entirely willing to believe, my dear fellow, that you honestly think you have visited the planet Mars. Indeed I will go a step further and admit that I haven't a doubt that I, had I inhaled the gas would now entertain some such notion myself."

"Then you do not believe that I have actually visited Mars?"

"No. I believe you have been in a condition wholly abnormal, your supposed experiences emanating from your own brain."

"Good! Now we understand each other. Let me say that my experiences were as real to me as ever the experiences of any month of your life on earth have been to you. Now George, for your question. Do you believe that while I was absent I paid you a visit?"

"I do," I replied firmly. "I doubt no longer; I believe it all."

"What is this? What is this?" cried the Doctor. "Something I have not heard?"

"Tell him, George."

I related my experience with Walla in the courtyard at Psam-dagong; of course I did not tell the Doctor of the warning spoken against himself.

"And do you claim to have controlled Walla's spirit at that time? he asked of Maurice.

"Oh no!"

"What then?"

"I controlled her brain, her lips. I merely spoke through her physical organs. How her spirit was disposed of I know no more than you do."

"And did you know what you were doing; were you conscious of speaking with George?"

"Certainly."

"Supposing yourself to be in Mars at the time?"

"Not supposing—being in Mars at the time. Such things are common enough there. Mental telegraphy is there universally practiced and its operators as well recognized as an ordinary telegraph operator here. I desired to speak with George, and Mirrikh took me to one of those persons, that is all. The first thing I knew I was speaking with George and heard him speak to me."

"But tell me, Maurice," I said; "has the question of distance anything at all to do with it?"

"Nothing whatever. It is simply a question of spiritual influx. If you desire to speak with a person at a distance, you must have a medium or operator at each end of the line, and either know the person yourself or find some one who does know him. If I am *en rapport* with you, it would be just as easy for a professional human telegrapher to assist me to address you at a distance of ten million miles as ten; while for me to attempt to converse with one with whom I was not *en rapport*, would be impossible at a distance of ten feet."

"By Jove! It would be a deuced good idea if you could strike up a communication with Mirrikh and get from him a letter of safe conduct out of this infernal country!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Eh, Maurice? What do you think of that?"

"I think it as unnecessary as it is under existing conditions impossible. Before we parted, Mr. Mirrikh promised that matter should be attended to, and rely upon it he will keep his word. By the way, George, he sent his warmest regards to you, and to you too, Doctor. He said that it was not likely he should ever return to earth again for a permanent stay, but if he did he should certainly look you up."

"Then by Jove! I hope he won't look me up!" growled the Doctor; "for my part I've seen quite enough of him."

Maurice laughed; begging a match of me he proceeded to light the pipe.

"Ah, this is like old times," he said, giving two or three preliminary puffs.

For ten or fifteen minutes we sat there chatting quite comfortably. Indeed Maurice was so much the old Maurice that I was just beginning to wonder if it would not come around all right, when all at once he was seized with a most violent fit of coughing and choking and the pipe dropped from his hand.

"Oh God! Oh! Oh! This is frightful!" he groaned. "Oh, I am suffocating! I've done it now! George! George! Help her! Help!"

He pressed his hand to his forehead, half arose, but instantly fell back again, his face deathly white.

Then relief came, and the Doctor felt that his efforts to increase the consumption of rice in this section of Thibet had been wasted. As he gasped and choked I saw that strange look creep over his face again, and with it came a change of speech, and Maurice began muttering wildly in the unknown tongue.

"Tobacco sick, by Jove!" cried the Doctor. "An old smoker too! Can't account for it. What's he mumbling about? What did he mean by upon calling you to help *her?*"

"Let us help *him*," I answered hastily. "Come Doctor, we must get him to my bed."

"Which being of sand is a shade softer than the stone. All right, my boy. Maurice, you'll have to walk now."

But there was no Maurice to answer us so far as intelligence went. He kept on muttering strange words and wept, holding out his hands beseechingly. The Doctor took him on one side and I on the other and together we raised him up. It was painful to witness the struggle he made to walk. He would plant one foot forward and hold on to us

desperately while he dragged the other to its proper position, talking all the while in that same unknown language. At last we succeeded in getting him to the place where I usually slept and laid him down. In a few moments he sank off to sleep.

Long the Doctor and I sat watching him, discussing his strange condition in all its bearings. The face turned toward us was in no sense Maurice's; we studied it carefully and were both of the opinion that it was a face in which the feminine strongly predominated. I took occasion to feel not only of the pulse but also the heart several times. That the pulse had a double action was undeniable, and it was precisely the same with the heart. We could feel two distinct beats with each throb it gave. The Doctor made a most careful examination of the lungs also, but could detect no difference there.

"One thing is certain, George," he said at last; "your friend has come back to us in a most remarkable condition. If he survives it will be a miracle. His whole internal organism seems to be deranged."

"Suppose we call Padma in consultation?" I suggested. "He must be over his anger by this time. I'm sure he will not refuse."

To this the Doctor agreed, and as he had been the offending party, it was decided that I should be the one to go and fetch the old lama, and I accordingly started down the cave in the darkness, expecting to see the light which the lamas always kept burning as soon as I rounded a certain angle, for between our quarters and those of the lamas the cave took a sharp turn.

Soon I caught the glimmer of the lamp and hurried forward more rapidly. I thought it a bit strange that I did not see Ni-fan-lu or one of the other lamas on guard, for one invariably watched while his companions slept, but not one of them was visible now.

How still it was! I believe the slightest sound would have caused me to start in terror, for the recollection of those unearthly visitants was still strong upon me. At last I reached the lamp, which rested upon a large flat stone around which the lamas usually lay at night, and to my astonishment could not discover a soul.

Like a flash the truth dawned upon me. I seized the lamp and hurried toward a small recess where Padma slept alone.

This was also vacant. Back again into the open cave I flew, and flashed the lamp toward the corner where the lamas kept the bags and various belongings sent down the shute from Psam-dagong. Not a vestige of any of these articles remained.

"They have deserted us!" I murmured, striving to be calm; "they have deserted and Ah Schow has gone with them! It is long past midnight, and this must be the morning of the day they have been looking forward to. This is Padma's revenge."

With tottering steps I moved toward the cañon. The rawhide bridge over which the lamas had toiled so patiently was missing too, and I strained my eyes as I approached the mouth of the cave, expecting to see it laid across the rift.

Now the roar of the torrent greeted me. I could hear the water's swash against the rocky walls as it went tumbling through the chasm. Then a splash of rain struck my face, and my ears caught another sound. It was the rushing of the wind through the cañon, and I knew that the storm was still raging above us. Ten steps more and I had reached the brink.

The bridge was there! Oh yes, it was there! I could see it with hideous distinctness as I flashed the light across the rift.

At my feet was the iron peg driven into the rock, by which it had been fastened, but the bridge lay all in a heap on the other side of the cañon, close to the entrance of the passage. By what occult power it had been conveyed there, God alone could tell, but there it was, and who could question that over it the last lama had crossed, and then, doubtless by Padma's direction, our escape had been cut off.

We were deserted. Left alone to face the horrors of the cave until Death should come to our relief!

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOPE.

"GONE! Do you mean to tell me that they are all gone?" cried the Doctor, when I broke the news.

"Gone to a man, and Ah Schow with them. The bridge lies upon the other side of the cañon. We have been abandoned to our fate!"

The Doctor gave an exclamation of despair.

"My God! My God! This is terrible!" he breathed. "I would never have dreamed that mild old man could use us so! It is all my fault, George! All mine, every bit of it. From the first moment I met you on the stairs of the old tower of the Nagkon Wat, I have been nothing but a dead weight upon you, a perpetual handicap, a Jonah, a curse."

"Do not upbraid yourself," I answered, for his distress was most painful. "It was perfectly natural for you to speak. Let us waste no time in idle regrets. We must decide upon some definite course of action, and follow it without delay."

"Oh there's time enough! God knows there's time enough! Is the rice all gone too?"

"I didn't look into the corner where the provisions were stored."

"Then I will go and do that much! Hark! What voice was that? Some of those devils back to mock us in our misery? Merciful powers! Is the mountain falling down?"

The sound first heard was a sharp cracking, followed immediately by an awful crash. The ground beneath us shook with great violence. Maurice raised up and began muttering unintelligible words.

"An earthquake!" gasped the Doctor. "This is to be our end!"

At the moment I could but agree with him; we stood breathlessly listening, the noise dying away into an ill-defined rumble and then all was still.

"Surely that was an earthquake shock," said the Doctor.

"I cannot imagine what else it could have been," I an-

swered, and yet Thibet is not an earthquake country."

"Who knows whether it is or not? Who knows anything about it? Who can tell where we are?"

"In my opinion it is much more likely to have been a landslide, caused by the rain."

"By Jove! You've hit it, George! No doubt you are right, and we've heard the last of it. Here, let me have the lamp and I'll go and have a look around for myself. See what Maurice is talking about, if you can make out."

"Has he spoken before?"

"No."

"And Walla?"

"I have seen nothing of the girl. It wouldn't surprise me if she had wandered off into the depths of the cavern and lost herself; or like as not she has committed suicide. Her's is one of those dreamy, over-morbid natures. For weeks she has lived in the anticipation of Maurice's return, and now that he is back again and has rejected her, Lord knows what the effect may be."

He caught up the lamp which I had brought with me from the outer cavern and hurried away. I turned to Maurice who had now risen to a sitting position; his face was toward me, the eyes were filled with tears, the hands extended pleadingly as though beseeching help—help which I could not give.

"What is the trouble?" I asked, seating myself beside him. "That noise was nothing. If you heard my startling disclosure let me beseech you to try and be something like your old self once more. I need your help, Maurice—I do indeed."

Not to my surprise, but to my infinite sorrow, he began ratling on in that same strange way. I listened attentively. It was certainly a definite language he was speaking. Its sounds were soft and extremely melodious, far more so even than Spanish. As my ear grew accustomed to them I could detect the frequent repetition of certain particular words. "This," I thought, "must be one of the languages of Mars."

"I cannot understand you old fellow," I said, sadly. "It is no use. Awhile ago you had no difficulty in speaking English. Why not do it now?"

Again he broke into weeping and laying his head against my breast sobbed like a child. I put my arm around him, stroked his hair and spoke soothing words. Did he under-

stand me? Perhaps not, but the calmness or my sphere seemed to sooth him and gradually he grew quiet, even smiled.

Now suddenly he pulled himself away and pointed to his face, indicating each feature separately. I felt that he wanted me to fully appreciated the change which had come upon him, but there was no need to call my attention to it, for I appreciated it already. Certainly it was not Maurice's face upon which I gazed; just as surely was it the face of a woman. I was puzzled beyond all telling, but I strove to retain my calmness, feeling that thus my power to help him must be greater.

Suddenly he began rubbing his face with both hands in the most violent fashion and I saw his whole frame tremble. Once he groaned; again a sharp cry of pain escaped him, then the hands fell and the strange expression had gone.

Now it was a man's face—it was the face of Maurice De Veber, my friend!

What was this? What was it? What wondrous change had come over Maurice since we parted in the lamasery of Psam-dagong?

"George!"

He called my name—something he had not done since he dropped the pipe.

"Oh Maurice! My poor friend!"

"Pity me, George. I'm in an awful fix!"

"Pity you! Maurice I am ready to lay down my life for you. But while you are able to talk intelligently, let me ask you if you know that the lamas have deserted us—that all hope of escape from this cave has been cut off?"

"Yes, yes, I know all."

"Then you could understand me even though I was not able to understand you."

"I did not hear you, George, but she did—she told me."

"Maurice, you will drive me mad. In God's name who is this mysterious *She* to whom you keep alluding?"

He looked about warily.

"Where is the Doctor?" he whispered. "He must not know."

"He has gone to look into our situation."

"He is out of hearing?"

"Oh yes. What is it Maurice? Explain your condition. I doubt if you can realize how desperate it appears to us."

"Indeed I do, and to me."

"But will you explain?"

"To you, yes; but not to him, ever. Pity me, George. I am a lost man. I have committed a fatal error. May God send death quickly to my relief."

"Tell me—tell me all! This suspense drives me mad! Maurice, tell me! I can bear this no longer, my friend."

"Nor shall you," he said, speaking very rapidly. "George, prepare your mind for a mystery; a mystery greater by far than any of the many mysteries with which you have been brought in contact since you first met Mr. Mirrikh in the streets of Panompin. George, *I have brought a woman back with me from Mars!*"

I sprang to my feet, and extended my hands towards him.

"Don't, Maurice! Don't give way to it! Hold your reason! Don't allow yourself to think of it again."

"George, it's a solemn fact. We are here together. I love her, George! I love her with an intensity bred of the conditions of the planet to which Mirrikh took me, and of which you can form no conception. She is my wife, George. I married her on Mars!"

It was maddening to listening to him, yet I restrained myself. I saw that he must be indulged.

"Well, well, old fellow, if you say so, of course it must be so; but—you will excuse me for asking the question—where have you left her? You will have to admit she is not here?"

Suddenly a sound reached my ears. It was a groan—it seemed to come from behind Maurice. If he heard he showed it by no sign.

"But she *is* here, George. More than that you have seen her, you have talked with her. George, you cannot comprehend it—it is incomprehensible. My wife is within me. We are two souls in one body. Heavens! Only think of it! If we ever do get home they will clap me into a lunatic asylum as sure as fate. Oh George, George! Would to gracious I had listened to the advice of Mirrikh and been content to wait until death released us both, and we could meet in the spirit world."

"So Mirrikh advised you against it?"

"He did—most earnestly. You see the time had come when I was to return. They told me it was either that or death, for my body would be destroyed if I delayed longer.

They spoke of peril threatening you, George, and that helped to influence me. We talked of parting, but it was no use, we couldn't do it. She's the dearest creature, George, but oh her weight is something awful! Tell me—tell me, what am I to do?"

I shook my head helplessly.

"Do you mean to say that——"

"I mean to tell you just that; Merzilla, my wife, is inside of me at the present moment, George, as truly as I am in my body myself. You grasp the situation; besides that you must remember her for Mirrikh said you saw her when you were on Mars."

"Do you refer to the girl who stood beside you when Mirrikh delivered his lecture before that great assemblage?"

"Yes, yes!" he cried joyfully. "Then you actually were there? If I had only known it! He said so afterward—but of course I couldn't see you. Yes, George, that's the girl. Tell me, what do you think of her? Isn't she the most superb creature? Heavens! It is frightful to think of the situation we are in? Why, that bit of a smoke almost killed her, and as for the rice—well, just fancy offering her rice to eat. Oh, if you had only staid longer on Mars!"

"Maurice," I said firmly; "this thing must stop right here. We must come to an immediate understanding, for the Doctor may be back at any moment. Evidently you believe these strange assertions and you have done well to tell me, for I am beginning to believe you have some foundation for them. At first they were so startling as to banish even memory; but memory has now returned, Maurice. My dear boy, I fear that I, of all men on this earth, alone can comprehend you. In a situation somewhat resembling yours I have been myself."

"You, George!"

"Yes; even I. Listen."

I told him then of Hope; described even to the minutest details my own strange experiences after inhaling the gas. I concealed nothing and yet a moment before I would have perished rather than disclose that which I had come to cherish as the most holy of memories."

His sense of relief was so manifest as he listened that I was forced, in spite of myself, to in some measure credit his astounding claim.

"You have described it to a hair, George; and there's no

use saying another word. You met your soul's mate and parted with her again. I have mine within me. We could not part. We were warned, but we resolved to take our chances. If we could only manage to walk it wouldn't be so bad."

"Let me try and understand you," I said, earnestly. "Do you actually feel her bodily weight? It cannot be, even allowing——"

"Even allowing I'm sane! Out with it. No, it is not exactly that! It is a sort of brain pressure. I feel like a man whose hat is too tight for him; as though a lump of iron was on my head. When I try to move I cannot control my limbs. With my poor girl it is even worse, for when she takes control, the very air seems to stifle her and your voices sound hideous. She is furiously jealous about Walla too. Oh dear, I'm sure I don't see what we are going to do."

I stared at him helplessly. In spite of my own confession any one might have seen that I was not fully converted even yet.

Just then I thought I heard a groan again, but as before Maurice paid no heed.

"You see we can't both make my physical brain act at once George," he continued. "When I take control my individuality is in the ascendant and that gives me my natural expression and lets me talk to you as I am talking now, but when she takes hold I am obliterated, pushed out of existence for the time being, as it were. Then my face becomes transfigured until it looks almost like hers, she tells me, and she can only talk to you in her own language; but we neither of us seem able to fully control the body; perhaps we may learn in time."

"It is a desperate situation, Maurice. I am trying to comprehend it, but it comes very hard."

"And if you find it hard what on earth will others do? Mirrikh told me that it was madness, but I listened to the advice of another, an over-enthusiastic fellow who claimed to have lived double on Jupiter. You see it's very common for man and wife to occupy one body on Jupiter, and——"

"Stop!" I interrupted. "I beg you will stop! Whatever you may know about these matters you will do well to keep to yourself. Later, perhaps, you and I may talk them over, but what we want now is to devise some plan to get you out of your desperate fix?"

"Exactly, but what can be done? Merzilla must either have a body or remain inside of me."

"Her name is Merzilla?"

"Yes. Do you not think it pretty? It means——"

"No matter! No matter! Let me think!"

"There's one thing I may as well tell you, George; you will believe it or not, as you like. I was informed before I left Mars that if we could catch upon a woman in the very act of dying, Merzilla could, under certain conditions, seize her body, enter into it and reanimate it. Of course I don't understand how, but on Mars——"

"Of course you will never mention it again if you want to avoid the asylum you feared just now."

"Oh I suppose it's no use. Of course we can find no such chance, though it's almost enough to tempt a fellow into murder. Then there is the question of eating. They don't eat such food as we do on Mars. I know just how to provide for Merzilla if I could only get about, and in time she would learn to eat our dishes, but so long as I can't control my legs, what am I to do?"

"You are to stop talking now," I whispered hurriedly, "for here comes the Doctor, and—bless me! It is Walla back again! Has she been listening! Has the poor girl heard?"

Out of the darkness behind us Walla was seen gliding. There was a peculiar calmness about her face; she tottered toward us and sank down upon the sand at Maurice's feet.

"I will help you, my friend, my love!" she murmured. "If I cannot have your heart, at least I can relieve your suffering. Take my life! Take it! Let the woman who has your love have my body also. Then when my spirit is free I shall be able to remain ever at your side! Do it, Maurice! Oh, my love do it! I will be your wife in spirit! Let her have my body, and all will be well."

"I listened, awe-stricken by her very earnestness."

Where I accepted most dubiously, she seemed to grasp the situation and give full credence to Maurice's amazing claim. She meant it all—she meant every word she uttered. To Walla there was no moral chord strained in the thought of sharing Maurice's heart with another. To her ideas, being with Maurice in spirit was as real as being with him in the body. On the principle "better half the loaf

than no bread," she was not only willing but anxious to make the sacrifice and ease the strain all around.

But I doubt if Maurice quite understood her at first.

"No, no! You talk nonsense—ridiculous nonsense!" he muttered pettishly, but he had not the heart to push her away.

It was most painful to watch her. She fairly grovelled at his feet, kissing his knees and trying to seize his hand.

"No, no! Get up! Get up girl!" he cried. "Take her away George! For God's sake, take her away!"

Really I wonder I had not attempted to interfere before, but something seemed to restrain me. Was it the same influence which kept one word forever ringing in my ears? Possibly. Need I write the word? Need I say that it was:

"Hope!"

Suddenly Walla's wild ejaculations ceased and a convulsive shudder swept through her whole frame; she sank back upon the sand, trembling and twitching. I thought I knew what was coming, but I did not speak, for the change which now came over Maurice took all my thought.

He leaped up with a wild shout and began running about over the sand.

"She is gone, George! She is gone! Oh God! send her back again. Don't let her go!"

There was something in it. I felt then that there must be something in it; but still I was restrained from speaking, and in an instant Walla staggered to her feet. Her eyes were closed and the lids kept twitching. The expression of her face had altered somewhat. It was softer—more refined. She made one rush toward Maurice, speaking rapidly, unintelligible words.

"Merzilla! My Merzilla!" he murmured brokenly; opening his arms he folded her to his breast.

Still I remained dumb! Still the same strange spell was upon me. As one looks at distant objects through a mist I saw them; the sound of their voices—they were both speaking that strange language—fell upon my ears as the confused murmuring of some distant stream.

How long was it? Seconds, minutes or even more than minutes; I cannot tell. I seemed to be far from them. I could not have interfered had I tried, and the next I knew Maurice was sitting down again with Walla crouching upon the sand.

"George! George!" he called. "Arouse yourself old fellow. Merzilla says that God has ordained the sacrifice—that it will come in the natural order of events and by no act of mine."

"Who—what is the matter?" I gasped. "I feel so very odd. I——"

"Hark! Look! Look there!"

He was pointing down at Walla.

I looked and instantly realized what was coming. I had seen it too often to be deceived! About the girl's body a white cloud was gathering; the unseen beings around us were at their work again.

I was powerless to speak—I could only look. Slowly the cloud grew denser, until in an ill-defined way it had assumed the human shape. Suddenly vanishing then, I next saw it upon the sand—there was a form in white between Walla and Maurice. It was a woman upon her hands and knees. For a few seconds she remained thus, and then shot upward and stood before me at her full height. I was gazing at a face beautiful beyond description—a face which æons of time would not have sufficed to make me forget. Our eyes met, and she glided toward me with outstretched arms. How tall and graceful she was! How queenly every motion she made!

"George! My love! My soul's companion! It is I! I have fulfilled my promise! For the last time until you have penetrated the veil you behold me. Hope!

I sprang forward to grasp her, but it was too late! Before my extended hands could touch her form she sank down, seemingly dissolving into an undefined mass of whitish vapor, and I found myself clutching at the empty air.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHAOS.

"THEY'VE gone! By Jove, there ain't a trace of them! Boys, we are deserted for a solemn fact."

It was the Doctor's voice and it came in good time, for the strain was more than I could bear.

But evidently he had seen nothing of it all, for he came hurrying toward us with the lamp in one hand and a big earthen pot filled with cooked rice in the other. Upon his face I could read despair.

It seemed amazing that I should be able to recover my equanimity with so much ease, but I answered him as calmly as though nothing of an exciting nature had occurred; and this with every nerve in my body quivering; this in spite of the fact that I was trembling from head to foot.

As for Maurice, he showed no disposition to interfere. The same strange calmness seemed to have come to him as to myself. Probably Walla still remained entranced, for she neither spoke nor moved.

"Then you found things as I told you, Doctor?"

"Well I should say so! They've gone, every mother's son of them, and this pot of rice is all in the way of eatables left behind. Thought I might as well freeze on to that while there was time, for fear it might be spirited away too. But I say, Wylde, how do you suppose they put the bridge across the rift?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you. Have you found out?"

"Found out! No indeed; I'd like to know, though. Time was when I should have called it a miracle, but in this devil's den miracles are as plenty as bees about a hive. I give it up. Maurice, old man, how do you feel now?"

"Better," answered Maurice, "much better, thank you Doctor, but I haven't got my legs yet."

"That will come in time; but look here, my boy, you must eat something. Let me warm you up some rice. It's all we have. We may as well view the situation philosophically, eat, drink and be merry, for as sure as there is a God above us, we are doomed to death by starvation unless help reaches us from outside."

"Which," said I, "is most improbable—still do I hope."

"You will hope in vain then, We are in a desperate situation, and all owing to me."

"How to you, Doctor?" asked Maurice.

"Do not let us talk about that," I interposed. "The Doctor is not to blame. I will stir up the fire, and if Maurice wants the rice he shall have it. Morning will soon be here, and perhaps it may bring us good fortune of which we little dream."

"It can't," said the Doctor, decidedly. "The proposi-

tion is simply an impossible one. There is only one chance for us. The lamas may not have gone for good, but only retreated through the passage on the other side of the rift, intending to return with the daylight and help us across."

It was but a slender thread to hold to. "This," I thought, "cannot be why I was told to hope."

I left the Doctor talking with Maurice, and moving toward the spot where the argols still smoldered, proceeded to stir them up and heap on the few uncharred ones which still remained. Still the calmness was upon me. I had an ill-defined feeling that in spite of the assurance I had received to the contrary, I should see her again.

And as I worked the impression grew stronger and stronger. I found myself looking behind me; actually listening for the rustle of those snowy garments; I could not divest my mind of the idea that she was close at hand.

Was it so?

God knows!

All I can say is—and most positively do I affirm it to be a solemn fact and no illusion—that then as the sense of nearness increased I heard her voice.

"George! Fly to the mouth of the cave!" it said; "death is close upon you! Lose no time! Fly! Fly!"

But why should I have done it when it seemed then as if I had no other desire than to join her beyond the veil?

Surely I was not master of my own actions, for I dropped the argols and bounded back to Maurice's side.

"We must go!" I cried excitedly. "We must fly! Something is going to happen! There is no time to be lost!"

"Fly the devil!" burst the Doctor. "Where the deuce are we to fly to? Are you going off the handle too, Wylde?"

I certainly was not myself at that moment, for I made him no answer, but seizing Walla, raised her up. She opened her eyes, staring at me stupidly.

"We are going to leave here," I cried. "Do you hear me? Can you walk?"

"Yes—why not?"

"Keep close to us then. Come, Maurice."

"George, I can't walk: You will have to carry me."

"Nonsense, Nonsense!" exclaimed the Doctor. "One place is as good as another. Calm yourself, Wylde. Nothing but trouble can come of giving away to the horrors of our situation like this."

"No, no! We are to go! I have had a most vivid impression of impending danger. For God's sake, Doctor, humor me this once! Help me carry him to the mouth of the cave."

"And then——"

"Then we shall see. Ah, it has come! Too late! Too late!"

Something had happened.

Suddenly the strange cracking sound was heard again, and in a second a fearful crash came.

The next I knew I was flung violently upon the sand; crash followed crash, mingling in one hellish roar, until as suddenly as it had come upon us all sound ceased.

We were all upon the sand now—no living creature could have stood up against that shock.

"Look! Look there!" shrieked the Doctor, pointing behind the stone near which Maurice had sat.

He was pointing at black vacancy—nothingness! The rocky walls had vanished, the cold rain was beating in upon us—the unexplored depths of the cavern had disappeared.

"Is it an earthquake?" gasped Maurice. "Oh, George, this is terrible! Terrible! And after we were told to hope!"

I leaped to my feet, for something seemed to tell me that all depended upon my coolness now.

"We must make for the mouth of the cave," I shouted. "You see I knew what I was talking about, Doctor; if you cannot help me to carry Maurice I must carry him alone."

The Doctor never spoke a word but moved toward Maurice.

I bade Walla take the rice pot and she seized it, while the Doctor and I lifted Maurice upon our interlocked hands, that persistent objector obeying my commands as meekly as a child.

"There is still hope for us." I said, prophetically. "Courage, my friends! We shall yet be saved!"

God knows why I said it, when there seemed so little cause to hope.

We hurried forward, Walla following in silence; here the roof of the cavern was still above us—here there had been no change. In a few moments we stood at the very brink of the cañon with that wild torrent tumbling over the rocks at our feet.

Now at last my strength failed me. I was as weak as a baby when we put Maurice down.

"By Jove, but this is tremendous!" gasped the Doctor. "At least we've got a moment to draw our breath in before chaos comes."

"And it's coming," I said calmly.

"I believe you! Maurice, your weight is something fearful."

Maurice staggered to his feet, and catching my arm clung to me trembling; yet he was entirely cool.

"This is no earthquake," he said. "I have experienced too many shocks since I have been in the East to make a mistake."

"But what else then? We are supposed to be on a mountain—is the mountain tumbling down?" asked the Doctor.

It is a wash-out of some sort," I asserted boldly. "You know we decided some time since that we were in a limestone region, Doctor; the cavern may have been undermined for years for all we know."

The Doctor groaned and stared across the rift helplessly. "Oh, if we were only over there! If we were only over there," he kept saying. "How did they do it? How—ah! It has come again! This is the last call, boys! Gad! I've a mind to jump for it. Here goes."

I clutched his arm in time and held him back. What he proposed could only have been a leap into the great beyond, for across the rift was more than thirty feet.

Meanwhile the loud cracking which had startled him was followed by a crash awful beyond all telling, and I saw the whole roof of the cavern break away. Great rocks were falling all about us; behind, a black gulf had opened; whirling down from snow-clad peaks now for the first time visible, a mighty wind came sweeping, splashing the rain about as though some bursting reservoir had been suddenly emptied out upon our devoted heads, but through it all that same strange calmness still held its sway.

"Hope!" I cried, flinging one arm about Maurice who was sinking slowly down upon the rocky ledge. "Hope! This is not our end."

Hope for what?

What could save us?

Yet above that awful din my voice arose loud enough for all to hear.

Suddenly the rock upon which we stood began to crumble; huge fragments broke away at our very feet and went whirling down into the yawning gulf.

Hope!

The word was but mockery!

Chaos would have been more befitting, for chaos had surely come!

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE ROCK.

"THE sun! The sun! God be praised! We see the sun again!"

And Maurice De Veber, as he thus exclaimed, stretched his hands out toward the eastern horizon, above which the first red glow of the sun's great disk had become visible. We watched it in the moments which followed and saw it rise above that mighty chain of snow-clad peaks.

The night had passed away; the storm had fled with the dawning of the morning. One by one the stars which had appeared only to vanish, faded out of sight, and another day was upon us. Chaos had come and was gone again, and we were still alive to tell the tale.

But where were we?

It will not take long to tell it. Our abiding place is soon described.

We were high in the air, crouching upon a flat surface of rock, twenty-three feet in length, sixteen feet, eight inches at the widest part—the Doctor measured it—while down to the nearest foothold below was a hundred feet, at the very least, and this was but a mass of broken rocks and debris, with the water on every hand, rushing down the slope like mad.

Do not expect me to tell what had happened. We never definitely knew. I feel safe in asserting, however, that it was but a cutting away of the limestone rocks on that mountain slope, caused by the rush of water from the Dshambinor, which had been pent up in the ravines above us by the ice.

This, at least, is my idea of it; but it is only an idea. We were on the side of a mountain still. The whole country seemed to be one vast mountain, broken into ravines and separate peaks innumerable; the newly-formed ravine in which our pillar stood was wider than most of the others—that was all.

Only on the side of the rift, directly opposite to what had before been the mouth of the cave, no change had come. To the right, the left and behind us, the rocks had been torn away by that awful washout, landslide—or whatever you may be pleased to call it; but directly in front was the ledge to which the lamas had crossed, and there, still, the hide bridge lay before what had been the mouth of the passage, now appearing as a natural arch through which the sunlight came streaming, its radiance falling full upon Walla's upturned face. Walla was upon her knees; she seemed to be praying, but whether to the God of the Christians or the God of her fathers, I cannot tell. That I rejoiced at the welcome sight equally with my friend need not be said.

Moments passed and I did not answer, but remained gazing off upon the sunlit landscape in gloomy silence, for a state of deep depression had succeeded my rapturous enthusiasm. Now I could see no possible avenue of escape; no cause for hope!

"What are you thinking of, George?" demanded Maurice. "You're as solemn as an owl. Why don't you act the true philosopher like the Doctor? See how peacefully he is sleeping there."

It was true. Utterly worn out at last, Philpot had sunk off into slumber, and lay stretched out at full length at my feet; and this when we were expecting every moment to feel the pillar crumbling beneath us and to find ourselves whirling down to an awful fate.

"What do you suppose I am thinking of?" I said, sullenly.

"Of the same thing I was; the morning we met Mirrikh on the tower of the Nagkon Wat."

"Indeed I was not! I only wish I had never known Mirrikh. I was thinking of this pillar which is all that stands between us and eternity, and wondering if this was the way those rock pillars around the grand cañon of the Colorado were formed."

"Like enough; but if you love me do brace up, old man.

For my part I don't care much whether we get out of this or not. God knows I could never live as I am."

"Do you know, Maurice, I find it very hard to believe you are as you claim to be, now that the sunlight has come. In the gloom of the cavern I was able to work myself up to it, but now it is a different thing."

"I wish to God it was different with me then! If you could only change places with me for a couple of minutes! You'd know all about it if you could."

"Thank you! I'm bad enough off as I am! You were able to eat that rice though. Last night you told me that your friend Merzilla didn't like rice."

"Don't—don't, for heaven's sake, George! Your lightness of speech wounds me dreadfully. Have you forgotten that divine creature who rose up before you last night? George, you and I no longer are as other men. To deny the existence of the spirit now as you denied in our old discussions would be but a sorry stand for a man of your common sense to take. Look at me, George! As God hears me, I never expect to see another earthly sunrise; yet I am happy in the thought, for how much brighter—ah, how much brighter—the rise into the light of the heavenly sun, the Lord of life and light itself; the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end!"

A rapt expression had now come upon his countenance, he stretched his arms open toward the sun, and bowed low before it just as we saw Mr. Mirrikh do on the tower of the Nagkon Wat.

Recalled in a measure to my former mental condition by the allusions to the happenings of those strange moments, I spoke quite calmly, even lightly, in reply.

"What? You haven't turned sun worshipper, Maurice?"

"We are all sun worshippers on Mars, George. As the natural sun rules the visible world, so does the spiritual sun, which is the creative power of the universe, rule the spheres innumerable of the world unseen. Sun worship was the worship of all primitive peoples, because they possessed knowledge in matters spiritual of which we have no conception. Thus knowing the harmony existing between things natural and things spiritual, they bowed before the natural sun as the visible representation of the universal Creator, and this even while they worshipped his attributes, his differing aspects toward mankind, under a thousand forms."

"There may be much in what you say; but tell me, Maurice, when Walla seemed to be controlled and you spoke with her—the time you walked, I mean—do you claim that the woman was then out of your body and in the body of that unfortunate girl? I have had no opportunity to ask you of this until now."

"Claim is hardly the word, George; it was so. But for heaven's sake don't let the Doctor hear."

"He is sound asleep."

"Don't be too sure."

"But I am sure," I answered, when suddenly the Doctor raised his head.

"You are mistaken, George. I am wide awake and listening, though I did drop off for awhile. I will not be mean enough to listen any longer to your secrets, Maurice, since you do not wish me to hear them, but I have heard enough already to show me in what particular direction your brain disturbance runs."

Maurice was furious; it was as much as he could do to restain himself; as for me, I was sincerely sorry that the subject had been brought to the Doctor's notice. He kept right on talking, for neither of us spoke.

"You may think that yours is altogether a new disease, my boy, but allow me to correct you. It's as old as Adam, whose case is the first on record, and you must admit that Adam was a deuced sight better off with Mrs. Eve inside of him than after she was let out to go apple stealing and fooling round with snakes, instead of attending to her domestic duties, as she should. During the Middle Ages such cases were common; and they are not undiscoverable now; almost any first-class lunatic asylum ought to produce three or four, at least. I remember when I had my last charge in London—it was an old church down among the watermen, on the very banks of the Thames—for a certain reason I'd rather not locate it exactly—there was a man who used to bother the life out of me insisting that he had a woman inside of him and wanting my advice as to how to get her out. I suggested an emetic, but——"

He paused for he caught the look upon Maurice's face. It was terrible! I knew what my friend was in anger for I had seen him angry in the old days at Panompin. He was furiously angry now, but before he could explode I interposed in the interest of peace.

"For God's sake Doctor, have a care what you say." I cried. "Here we are perched on top of this pinnacle expecting to be hurled to death at any moment. Are we to spend our last hours in senseless quarrels? Look! Look yonder through the arch on the other side of the cañon and tell me what you see."

"By Jove! It's a city!" cried the Doctor. "It's Lh'asa!"

And so it was. I had espied it while the Doctor was talking. There, far in the distance, lay the metropolis of the Buddhist world. Its low houses of snowy whiteness, interspersed in every direction with the gilded roofs of numerous temples, reminded me not a little of the city I had seen in my first Martian vision; high above all towered the majestic palace of the Tale Lama.

If there was any reliance to be placed upon the statements of geographers, this could be no other city than the far-famed Lh'asa.

And if this was true, then how far were we from Psamdagong? The length of those remarkable underground passages must have been greater even than we had supposed.

But we had ample time to ponder over the problem, for the day passed and darkness fell upon us. Still our rock stood firm.

It was a fearful day for me.

Added to the horrors of our situation was the dissension among us and poor Walla's condition.

The girl would neither speak nor eat; she would not even respond to Maurice, but remained in what I think must have been a half entranced condition, muttering in her own language at times. At first I thought she was praying, but afterward I rather came to doubt it. As for Maurice, he positively declined to hold any communication with the Doctor—would not even answer him when he offered an apology.

Then again in that old earthen pot we had perhaps five pounds of cooked rice and not a drop of water.

The horrors of thirst were already upon us and starvation stared us in the face.

Long before night came all hope had departed, and I prayed most devoutly that the rock might fall and hurl us to our doom.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MIRRIKH ONCE MORE.

It was a glorious night. The moon was at her full, the vault above us ablaze with stars innumerable. Far in the distance, through that natural archway, we could discern the twinkling lights of Lh'asa.

Midnight came and found Maurice slumbering. Not again had the transformation come upon him. If his claim was true and a female spirit from our sister planet was united with his own, then like a sensible creature she had kept in the background. Walla's condition remained as before. The Doctor and I sat together, conversing in low tones.

"Under these circumstances I consider suicide perfectly justifiable, even admitting a hereafter," Philpot was saying. "To-morrow will have afforded Padma ample time for any move he may intend to make, if indeed he intends any. If by this time to-morrow help has not come, the dawning of another day will not find me here, Wylde. I shall take my chances and discount the future, if I can muster up the courage to make the fatal plunge."

"In a case like this every man must decide for himself," I replied gloomily; "but for my part all doubts of an existence beyond the grave have vanished. Our lives were certainly not given us to throw away, and I shall stick it out to the end."

"But think of the horrors of starvation; think——"

He suddenly ceased to speak; his head fell forward on his breast, his eyes closed, his face became as white as death.

"Doctor! Doctor!" I cried, springing to my feet. I was in the act of bending over him when I heard that gentle voice in my ear, and a hand was softly brushed across my brow.

"Do not interfere with our work, George. Help is at hand. Remain perfectly passive or you will spoil it all."

Not since the last time I heard the voice in the cave had I experienced anything which I could ascribe to a spiritual

origin. Once more I was seized with that same sense of security; that same immeasureable calmness. Involuntarily I found myself repeating a single word, over and over again.

"Hope!" I kept murmuring. "Hope!"

I turned and looked behind me.

Maurice still slumbered. Walla crouched near him, her head bent forward, and there—oh God! there it was again—there was that bounding globe of light at her feet.

Hope!

I did hope now!

Silently I prayed that God might give his spirit messengers power to help us in this the hour of our sore distress.

I watched the light. It came and went. There seemed to be unusual difficulty in repeating the process which I had so often seen; but it came at last, and I saw at Walla's feet a man who was certainly not Maurice, nor yet the Doctor. He was crouching upon his hands and knees. By no human power could he have come unknown to me upon the rock.

Breathlessly I watched him; saw him writhe and twist about as though in agony, and then at last rise up with a spring and stand before me as perfect a man as I was myself.

One glance at his face was sufficient. It was a face yellow above and black below. There were those wondrous eyes gazing upon me with that same look of profound intelligence, that same calm assurance of power over me—over us all. It was the man I had met at Panompin, it was my friend Mirrikh. Least of all I had expected this. Had help come to me from the realms of material space? Had my prayer been heard in Mars?

Then he spoke—spoke in phrases which proved most conclusively that he possessed the power to read my very thoughts.

"Friend Wylde, I greet you!" he said, extending his hand, which I took in both of mine, finding it as surely flesh and blood as my own. "Gradually you are progressing on the higher planes of Nature's secrets. Know that time and space are but imaginary limitations. From the most distant of those glittering points above us I could come to you as easily as I have come from my home in Mars."

I tried to reply, but my voice seemed to die away into an incoherent murmur.

Withdrawing his hand he now produced a sealed letter which he laid in mine.

"Your safe conduct from Thibet," he said quietly. "It was an oversight on my part. Padma has all the prejudices of his people; moreover he fears for himself. He has indeed betrayed you. Your presence on this rock is known, and the sentence of death has been already pronounced against you. You are to be shot down where you stand, one by one; but this will protect you and carry you safely beyond the frontier. Look toward the city and you will understand that I speak truly in this."

He raised his hand, making quick passes before my eyes. Then as I looked through the arch, distance became as naught. I could see with the most astonishing distinctness. I was at the very gates of Lh'asa.

"You see the city?" he asked.

"I do, most plainly. It is precisely as if I were looking through a powerful telescope. I am there."

"Look again! Look at the foot of the mountain!"

Now suddenly I seemed to be looking down from a height upon a broad roadway, along which a troop of perhaps fifty armed men were trudging. They were dressed in the well-known costume of the Chinese military, and at the head of the procession the dragon flag floated.

"For you," he said. "In less than half an hour they will be beneath the arch. Present my letter to the commander and have no fear."

I inclined my head in dumb assent. I could not speak. Still he read my thoughts.

"To permit you to talk to me, Mr. Wylde, would only be to have objections raised, and each objection is just so much of a hinderance to my work. It is for this reason that we have entranced the Doctor and even thrown our dear friend into slumber. My time is short. I cannot waste the forces drawn from that poor girl to produce this body, for she is reserved for another work, which, strange as it may seem to you, is as much for her eternal welfare as for the good of those whom she will materially assist. Ask me your question now, I see it burning in your brain, but after that do not speak unless you would destroy all your chances of escape. In its way my power is as limited as your own."

"Maurice! Tell me!" I burst. "Did he actually go to Mars? Did I? Did——"

"Stop! This is idle. You know it is so!"

"But the other? Is Maurice's claim true? Is there actually within that body another soul than his?"

"It is true. Behold!"

"Not the soul!"

"No, no; not the soul! No man, no spirit, none but God himself can see the soul. Look at the Doctor and you will understand what I mean."

Again his hand passed before my eyes and they rested upon the Doctor. To my astonishment I saw that he was not alone. Above him stood a man's form, dim and shadowy, with wolfish face and hideous bulging eyes. He held his hands above the Doctor's head.

"It is the spirit which holds him in control," said Mirrikh. "It is a spirit which is ever with him, ever will be until he rises out of his sphere of intense selfishness, if happily that times ever comes; but this is not what I would have you see. Look at the Doctor himself."

Again I looked. I could see the whole internal organism of the Doctor's body, but not singly, as I should have supposed. I could see the heart busy with its ceaseless toil; I could detect every rise and fall of the lungs; I could look into his stomach, perceive its emptiness, and even feel its cravings; more wonderful than all, I could see the mysterious workings of each convolution of the brain, from which seemed to dart myriads of tiny sparks. At a single glance my eyes seemed capable of following these through the extension of every nerve in his body, and at the same time seeing that everything upon which they rested had its duplicate. There were two Doctors; one gross and material, the other thin, airy, most highly refined; but there was no other difference between them. If one was a man, then so also was the other. Not an organ, not a muscle, not even the most minute fibre which was not perfectly reproduced.

"It is the spiritual man you behold," said Mirrikh. "Until the heart ceases to beat, it remains enchained. Its life is eternal, it destruction as impossible as for you to tear one of yonder stars from heaven; and as it is with the Doctor, so also is it with every man on earth. But look now at Maurice and behold a mystery unfathomable to your Western schools of thought."

Instantly my eyes were upon Maurice.

Here my experience with the Doctor was repeated, but with a difference.

With wonderful distinctness I could discern the spiritual prototype of my friend, but there, mingled with it so strangely that I was unable to detect where one began and the other ended, was a complete duplication of every portion of the spiritual Maurice. I could see them separately, yet were they blended incomprehensibly. One was Maurice but the other was a woman. I could see her face with perfect plainess. More than that, I recognized her. It was the woman whom I had seen standing beside Maurice on Mars.

Now Mirrikh waved his hand and all this vanished. I was looking on his face again.

"You believe now?"

"I cannot do otherwise—I must believe."

"It is well that you do, for it is written that you must write, that those who will may read. The time is close at hand when a flood of spiritual light is to be poured upon the earth, arousing the Eastern adepts from their selfish lethargy; light before which the agnosticism of the West will melt away like snow before an April sun. Yours is the mission, friend Wylde, to in some slight degree aid in the coming of the light. It has already begun to shine, but it must be made to shine brighter and brighter still, until darkness is wholly banished, and men, as in the days of old, know Nature's secrets as the dwellers beyond the veil know them; know each other, not as they would seem to be, but as they are."

"God grant that I may be faithful to the trust!" I murmured.

"Have no fear. Your work is but as the work of one of the minutest fibres in the body whose interiors you have just seen. Help will be given you when help is needed. In the words of Jesus the Christ, I say unto you: "Watch and pray! The time is close at hand."

He ceased to speak and walked with firm tread toward the rift—that awful rift through which the water went rushing with its sullen roar.

To my continued amazement I saw that the break offered no obstacle to his progress. He seemed to float rather than walk across it. In an instant I beheld him on the other side. Silently, and with a sense of profound confidence in

his power, I watched him. He bent over the strips of hide and examined them with care, straightening up at last and looking toward me.

"Wylde," he called, "I am very sorry, but I find that it is going to take more force than I supposed to accomplish my purpose. My dear friend, I had intended that you should witness what I am about to do, but I must ask you to look the other way."

Then before I could reply, some influence more powerful than my own will forced me to turn my head.

It seemed but a moment, and in that moment a strange rush of sound swept past me.

"Look, Mr. Wylde! It is done!"

I turned.

The bridge was stretched across the rift and Mirrikh stood at my side.

"The way lies open before you," he said. "Save yourself, save your friends. Be faithful in the use God has given you to perform. I shall ever think of you with kindly remembrance. Farewell!"

He extended his hand; I grasped it warmly. As I did so his feet and limbs seemed to dissolve and he began slowly sinking down—I was forced to stoop low in order to retain my hold upon the hand.

In another instant the body was gone, the head and the hand I grasped alone remaining.

"Farewell!" the familiar voice exclaimed, and then the head vanished also.

I looked at my hand, for I still felt the grasp of his.

Delusion!

My hand was empty.

My friend Mirrikh had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ACROSS THE RIFT.

"MAURICE! Maurice! Wake up!"

"What's the row?" muttered Maurice. "'Taint time for the breakfast bell yet, mother. Do leave a fellow alone."

As space had been obliterated when my friend Mr.

Mirrikh made me see Lh'asa, so now with Maurice was time without existence. His dreams were of his mother; he was a boy again; his spirit, untrammeled, was living in the so-called past. And what is the past to man but a mental condition—a state? Free to act, how perfectly the spirit is able to resuscitate it. Maurice certainly saw his mother—in his dream.

"Come, come, old fellow! Wake up! Wake up," I repeated. "This is no time for dreaming. We have work to do. Wake up, Maurice. We are to be saved!"

He leaped to his feet and began staggering about the rock. I caught him by the shoulder and held him fast, fearful lest he should totter over into the abyss.

"Are you awake? Do you know that you are walking?" I demanded.

The instant I called his attention to the fact he sank down and declared he could not walk a step.

"What is the matter, George? I feel so queer?"

"Worse than before?"

"Altogether different. I feel elated. Somehow I seem to have a profound assurance that I shall soon be let out of my awful fix."

"God grant it; but look, Maurice. Look there! What do you see?"

"Merciful heaven! It is the bridge!"

"It is nothing else!" I cried triumphantly; "and look at this?"

I extended the letter.

"What is it, George?"

"Our safe conduct beyond the frontiers of Thibet."

Maurice gave a quick gasp.

"Mirrikh has been here," he breathed. "I knew it! He promised me and I knew he would keep his word. The laying of the bridge across the rift was his work."

"You are right! Mirrikh has been here. Maurice, that man is deserving of all your enthusiasm. He is indeed a most wonderful individual."

"Wonderful! He's a right good fellow, but there is nothing very extraordinary about him. There are thousands of just such men on Mars. Oh George! Why, why didn't you wake me? I shall never forgive myself for not having seen him. I counted on him to tell me what the deuce I am to do about Merzilla, and now it is too late!"

"He would not permit it, Maurice. He came up at Walla's feet, but he would not let me wake you. Said you had been made to sleep soundly on purpose, as he needed all the power he could gather to lay the bridge."

"But how did he do it?"

"Don't ask me. I was not allowed to witness the operation. All I can tell you is that he went across that cañon as though it was solid rock."

"Pooh! That's nothing. They do that floating in the air business right along, on Mars. All it requires is perfect faith; but about my affairs—did he leave any message for me, George?"

"He left his kindest regards. He told me that all had been arranged for your relief."

"But how? Did he say?"

"Upon that point he was indefinite."

"Confound his indefiniteness. I want—hold on! The Doctor is waking up."

He was right. At that moment Philpot's eyes opened; he stared stupidly, first at me, then at Maurice, then at the rift; springing up at last with a cry of surprise.

"Gad! The bridge! Padma has returned! We are saved!" And without waiting for me to answer he started across the rift.

"Selfish pig!" muttered Maurice in a tone of disgust.

I watched him breathlessly. Secretly I rejoiced that I had not been called upon to be the first, for the bridge was but a shaky affair at best, being simply long strips of hide laid close together with cross strips plaited in. There was no guard of any kind, not even a rope.

It creaked horribly as the Doctor trod upon it; worse still it took to swaying. I turned away in terror, expecting to see him dashed into the abyss.

"He can never do it," I murmured, when a shout told me that he was safely on the other side.

Then I opened my batteries upon him, upbraiding him for his selfish act.

"Hush! Hush," whispered Maurice. "For heaven's sake control yourself, George! Will it pay for us to get up a quarrel at a time like this?"

"Can't help it, Wylde," called the Doctor coolly. "If I had thought twice I shouldn't have done it, but I acted on

impulse and here I am, and here you can bet your bottom dollar I mean to stay."

"Better say you followed the promptings of some selfish devil you keep around you!"

My thoughts were upon what I had seen, but of course he did not understand.

"Take it easy! Take it easy," he called back. "If you had been civil about it I might have repented and come over again to help you with Maurice. You had better join me and stop your talk. The first you know the thing will tumble into the rift."

I had not thought of Maurice's condition until now.

"In heaven's name what are you to do?" I gasped. "You can never walk across."

"Never!"

"Nor can I carry you. Oh Maurice, we are as badly off as ever."

"Better get Walla over and leave me to my fate, George," he answered gloomily. "There is no help for it as matters stand. Perhaps you can get help once you are across."

"I shall never leave you," I replied firmly. "Maurice don't you think you might do it if you tried?"

"It is impossible."

"But—what's the matter?"

"Hush! hush," he whispered, raising his hand suddenly. "Merzilla is speaking. She says for you to take Walla and leave me. She assures me that it will be all right."

"No, no! I shall not do it."

"But you must; Merzilla orders it."

"You may feel it necessary to obey her—I do not."

"George, I beseech you! For God's sake do not refuse me!"

"Maurice, it is useless. My resolve is taken. Until I know that you are safe across the rift I shall remain where I am."

"Oh what can I say?" he cried. "What can I say to make you yield?"

"Come on, Wylde? Don't be a fool! We couldn't have carried him over anyhow. Come on, and we will go for help," shouted the Doctor.

But I never answered him, for creeping over Maurice's face I saw the change come again.

It was no longer Maurice who looked at me—it was the

face of the woman, if I ever saw a woman's face in this world.

More perfectly than before was it transfigured and it turned toward me pleadingly; again I was addressed in that unknown tongue.

God knows what she said, but her manner was unmistakable. She pointed toward the bridge, at Walla, at me.

There could be no doubt whatever that she was beseeching me to yield; but I was still stubborn and would not. Seeing determination in my face she caught my hand and kissed it again and again—she even grovelled at my feet, crying out in agony, pleading in unintelligible words.

"You see how it is, Wylde. He's off the handle again!" called the Doctor. "That settles it. You can do nothing now but save yourself if you have a grain of common sense left."

Still I should have remained firm to my purpose if I had not distinctly heard that well-remembered voice in my ear.

"Do it, George! Do it at once and trust in God!"

I felt that I could hesitate no longer.

"How is that thing fastened on your side?" I shouted to the Doctor. "Is there an iron peg, the same as here?"

"Yes."

"Will it bear both Walla and myself? I cannot leave the poor creature to cross alone."

"I should say it might; it seemed strong enough, but the swing is something terrible. You had better leave the girl till we can get help."

I paid no heed to this, but bent down and shook Walla gently. She had never even lifted her head since the appearance of Mirrikh upon the rock, Now, however, she responded, and looking up asked me what I wanted. I raised her and pointed to the bridge.

Instantly she clapped her hands to her face and began sobbing.

"Ah, it has come! I saw it all in my dreams!" she murmured. "It is to be my fate!"

"No, no! You will be saved! I shall help you to cross. Come, Walla. We are to go now."

"Let me say good bye. I know that I shall see him again, but now all looks so dark—so dark!"

She uncovered her face and moved toward Maurice, but drew back before she had taken three steps."

"No, no! I want nothing to do with you!" she hissed. "But for you he would have loved me!"

The answer came promptly. Though the words were past my comprehension, the tone was one of kindly pity. It seemed to have no effect upon Walla, however, for with a gesture of disgust she turned away and caught my hand.

"Come," she whispered. "Come! My father is over there! He is beckoning to me. Come—come! We must go!"

And we started, but I did not dare to look at Maurice.

"I will surely come back again if nothing turns up to help him," I murmured, as I planted my foot upon the bridge.

For the first few seconds I almost feared that I had over-estimated my courage. Though the bridge was wide enough for us to walk abreast the sway of the hides was fearful.

I closed my eyes, clutched Walla's hand despairingly and pushed on.

"Courage!" roared the Doctor. "Courage! you are almost over, George!"

My eyes opened; perhaps three feet remained—it could not be more than four—but those swaying hides *would* rock like mad.

Steadying myself as best I could, never daring to drop my eyes to the waters which surged below me, I plunged madly on—I had almost made it—the Doctor's right hand even grasped my left, when suddenly Walla slipped, fell forward, and in a twinkling was off our frail support.

Oh God, banish the memory of that moment!

I saw her fall; I saw her head strike the ragged edges of those merciless rocks, but thanks to the Doctor's strong hand, I held on.

She never gave one cry. Never again did I hear the sound of her voice.

"Hold on, George! Hold on! Keep cool, old man! Slowly now! Slowly! I may be a selfish pig, but by God I am not going to let go your hand!"

Oh the horror of it! The black, unspeakable horror!

I had one foot on the hides and one foot on the rocks, my body was bent till my head was below the bridge, but still I held on, hearing the Doctor's voice as though it were miles away; seeing that white, upturned face, over which the blood went trickling, gazing imploringly up from the depths

with eyes which seemed to look through me, beyond me, far away into the bright realms of the unseen!

But the Doctor held on like a Trojan, while I, with all my strength, pulled her up; raised her until he could grasp her other arm, and somehow we managed to lay her on the rocks.

"She's a goner, poor thing! That blow on the temple did it!"

Thus the Doctor; but I scarcely heard him. I staggered back a few steps, stretched out my hands toward Maurice, whose face I could dimly discern upon the other side of the rift; and then—why then I had no existence—I was obliterated. Chaos had come once more!

CHAPTER XXIX.

"BEHOLD, I SHOW YOU A MYSTERY!"

I WAS dreaming of Hope! I was at her side; together we were floating through realms of boundless space.

But it was not as it had been before. It was just as vivid, just as real, and yet there was a difference. I gazed into her eyes, I stretched out my hands to grasp her, but clutched at the empty air.

"No, George; not now!" I heard her say. "All danger has passed, and many useful years lie before you. Return to your work, but before I remove my power from your brain I would have you behold the workings of a mighty mystery —a mystery which concerns that mightiest of all mysteries—the human soul."

Then I thought she bent forward and kissed me, but when once more I tried to throw my arms about her, she was not there.

Nor was I the light and airy being which in fancy I had thought myself.

I was lying upon the rocks looking at the Doctor, powerless to move or speak.

Evidently he considered me simply in a faint, and had left me to look out for myself while he attended to Walla.

He had his ear against her heart when I first saw him, while his fingers pressed her pulse; but in a moment he stood up, muttering a single word.

"Dead!"

With all my might I tried to call out to him, but in vain.

Again he returned to the charge, and this time the examination was most searching.

Once more he rose up, muttering:

"Dead as a door nail!"

Then instead of turning to me, as one might naturally have supposed he would do, he stood gazing down upon Walla's face.

What did he see? What did he read in those white, silent features?

God knows! I only know what I saw, and, be it real, or be it but a dream, my eyes actually beheld what I am about to relate.

Above Walla hovered two females in snow white garments, with faces pure and refined beyond description. They seemed to be busy about her head; their hands moved with incredible rapidity.

For several moments, it seemed to me, I continued to watch them, then suddenly they rose into the air and with them rose Walla, perfect even to the smallest shred of her garments; yet another Walla remained stretched upon the rocks.

"She is dead! These are ministering angels taking her spirit away," I thought; when all at once something white seemed to flit across my vision, and to my utter amazement I beheld the woman whom I had seen standing by the side of Maurice on Mars, settling down over Walla's earthly form.

"It is Merzilla! She is seeking a body!" flashed over me, and I remembered Maurice's words.

For an instant she appeared to hover over Walla, her fingers moving like lightning. To me it seemed as though she were drawing from her own brain a silvery thread which she conveyed to the brain of the corpse.

Still I watched her. Still the work continued. The length of the thread was tremendous. It seemed as if miles upon miles of it had been unwound.

Would she never cease?

Just as I asked myself the question, I heard the Doctor's voice shouting in my ear.

"A miracle! By Jove! A miracle! Wylde! Oh Wylde!"

I sprang up and tremblingly caught his arm.

"Walla!" I gasped. "Walla? Does she live?"

"Look! I swear to you that a moment ago Walla was dead; but now look!"

Walla had risen to her feet, but over the face had come a wondrous change.

Walla!

But was it Walla?

Upon this point I prefer not to commit myself.

All I know is that where Walla's skin was dark, the face of the woman before me became as light as any blonde I ever saw. Where Walla's hair was jet black, the hair upon the head at which I now looked, I saw change to a light brown. As for the face—but enough! I shall say it boldly. I saw every feature of that face transformed. It was no longer Walla Benjow upon whom we gazed. It was the woman I had seen on Mars!

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

"A MIRACLE!" roared the Doctor; yet again. "Wylde, I'm as mad as the rest of you! By Jove! Did you see it? I swear to you man, she was dead."

But Walla—shall I call her Walla still?—paid not the slightest attention to us.

"Maurice! Maurice!" she shouted, running toward the edge of the precipice with outstretched hands, calling out when she reached it, in that unknown tongue.

I looked across the rift at Maurice.

Fearful was the change which had come over his face.

"Don't look at me, George Wylde!" he shouted. "Don't look at me, man! I did not do it! I swear to God I had no hand in Walla's death!"

Still, in spite of his prohibition, I might have looked at him—might even have attempted to argue the point when he reached my side, for already he had started, walking as

well as he ever walked, across the swaying bridge. In short, it is quite impossible to tell what I might or might not have done, had a not sharp exclamation from the Doctor warned me that still another change had come.

It was a light flashing beneath the arch.

There stood a man in Chinese dress holding in one hand a lantern, in the other the dragon flag.

Instantly I recognized him as the man who had headed the procession which Mirrikh showed me at the foot of the mountain, and I knew that the time for transcendental reflection had passed, never to return.

"By Jove! There's a whole troop of them!" gasped the Doctor. "The jig is up just as we've got everything fixed. We'll be marched off to the Tale Lama and be beheaded as sure as fate."

By this time Maurice was over the bridge and had flung his arms about—well, I suppose I might as well begin, and say Merzilla.

"Speak to them, George. They are all Chinamen!" he cried. "Now is the time to see if Mirrikh's letter is any good."

Through the arch they came pouring, with a hideous din of beating tom-toms and a formidable display of glistening spears.

I pulled out the letter, glancing hastily at the line of Thibetan characters inscribed upon it, and bowing low, laid it in the hand of the fat Celestial who came shambling toward us, evidently being in command.

He glared at me and then opened the letter—we watched him.

To save my soul from perdition I could not remember a solitary word of Chinese, though I had rather prided myself upon my pure Pekinese accent in the old days at Swatow.

Slowly he read the letter through to the end, and then, with a changed expression, bowed low before us—so low that the glass ball on his cap almost touched the rock.

"Peace be unto you, my lords lamas! These children of the Flowery Kingdom are at your disposal. May your path to the frontier be strewn with roses, and long life and much happiness await you in your native land!"

* * * * * * *

Years have passed.

I write these lines not upon Thibetan territory, but amid the most prosaic surroundings. I am in my bedroom in the house of my friend, Maurice De Veber. As I glance from my window I can see only other windows opposite, while the roar of the city penetrates the lowered upper sash.

Need I say that I am back in New York?

Scarcely.

For the true New Yorker there is but one city—his own.

Mirrikh's letter proved to be all that he had promised—but no more.

We never came any nearer to Lh'asa than the foot of the mountain.

Without an adventure worth narrating, we were escorted hurriedly to the frontier, and as the Doctor expressed it, "promptly fired across."

At last we found ourselves safe in Mandalay, from whence the journey to Calcutta was just nothing at all. And I learned from our conductor that to a certainty would we have met death but for that piece of paper which came so strangely into my hands.

At Calcutta, Doctor Philpot left us, and from that day to this I have never seen him, although we still occasionally correspond. The last I heard he was in Australia. He never makes the slightest allusion in his letters to our Thibetan experiences; although he writes in the most friendly spirit, and repeatedly refers to "the pleasant days at the Nagkon Wat."

One word more. The Doctor is preaching again. He has a charge at Wagga-Wagga, I think it is; I have mislaid his last letter and am not quite sure about the name. If his nature has changed I am not aware of it. Certainly his letters are written in the same light vein which ever characterized the man from the first hour of our meeting upon the tower stairs.

So much for the Doctor.

Concerning Maurice and his companion I have only this to say: he calls her Merzilla and speaks to her in a language which certainly is not one of the tongues of earth.

She is much like ordinary women and can now speak English, but seldom uses it in addressing her husband.

Maurice married her in Calcutta and she signed the

register Merzilla Layakwoma, giving her residence, etc., as Thibet.

Most surely is she a lady, and a highly intelligent one; most decidedly are they the happiest married couple I ever knew. But one thing mars their happiness. As yet there are no olive plants about their table. Maurice says there never will be any. Probably he is right.

As for myself, I live with these, my friends, for I have no others, unless, indeed, it is the Doctor—but stay, there is Mr. Mirrikh! Have I not a friend on Mars?

The thought is stupendous!

For years I could not pluck up courage to brave the sneers of the skeptical and follow Mirrikh's injunction; but at last I put myself down to the task, and for better or worse launch my strange story upon the world.

This done, I await the result with a calmness amounting almost to indifference.

I have done my part, and have but one ambition now—to meet her beyond the veil.

To those who have followed me through my strange adventures, I can express my state of mind in a single word.

Hope!

THE END.

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